



ANTIPASTI



IL PRIMO

*Douglas
Harper*
AND
*Patrizia
Faccioli*

THE ITALIAN WAY

FOOD
&
SOCIAL
LIFE



INSALATA



IL CAFFÈ

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Faccioli*

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TO FRANCESCA GIOVETTI
Mother, friend, and master of *cucina di Bologna*

and to

VIOLET ELEANOR BILLOW
May you savor the tastes of the world

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Acknowledgments

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I wrote the book largely in the friendly spaces I share with my wife Suzan, who always brings the pragmatist's wisdom to intellectual problems I take on. Suzan was in Italy for several of the dinners described in the book and always increased my understanding of what we experienced. And as a person who has spent much of her life in gardens and greenhouses, she has provided ideas about food and social existence that have been delightfully useful. Thanks, Sue.

We dedicate the book to Patrizia's mother, Francesca, who introduced me to Italian food well over a decade ago and continues to cook with the same vigor and skill as we finalize the manuscript in the spring of 2008. Our other dedication is to my granddaughter, Violet Billow, born on the Fourth of July, as I prepared the final version of the book. Our hope is that Violet's world will find a way to feed her generation, and the next, graciously and ecologically.

Douglas Harper



Sunday dinner with Agnese, Patrizia's aunt, and Francesca, her mother.

Setting the Table

Italy is famous for its cuisine, but most tourists must be content to sample Italian food in pizzerias, trattorie, and restaurants. It is not the worst thing, either. On my first trip to Italy, I ate in the same trattoria for five days running. I was a shy tourist; I'd mastered one place and that was enough. After the third day the staff treated me like family and the food was great, so why should I venture further?

Four years later I was invited to lecture in Italy for several days, in fact in Bologna, the same city I had visited before. The first day, my new acquaintance and host, Patrizia Faccioli, deposited me at her mother's for lunch. Patrizia had business to attend to and figured that Francesca and I would do fine together, even though we didn't speak each other's language. Well, as satisfying as had been the quality of food I'd eaten in my previously visited trattoria, I reached new heights of enjoyment when I visited Mamma Faccioli.

I still remember highlights of my first of many meals at Francesca's. It was Bolognese lasagna that won my heart. I thought I knew lasagna; I'd probably eaten it a hundred times. This was, however, different. The noodles were thin, yellow, tasty—just pliable enough to resist the fork or bite. They were stacked close to each other but were thin enough to absorb the tangy sauce that coated them. Mostly I remember the creamy béchamel (*besciamella*) sauce that replaced the gooey cheese typical of lasagna eaten outside Italian borders. Other tastes were new—was that nutmeg? I found the dish irresistible; I had seconds. In the meantime the courses kept coming, and Francesca and I had a wonderful time.

But while her lasagna was outstanding, it was not uniquely so. I eventually ate similar lasagna in other homes, and while there were variations on the theme, it was more similar than dissimilar. Why was this food so consistently good? And why was eating it with a virtual stranger such a pleasure?

So I took on a study of food, with Patrizia's guidance. We focus on material culture: how Italians transform raw materials to food, influenced by national, regional, and local cultures. Cultural definitions unite people and define outsiders; they show us how to occupy formal and informal social roles, from families to friendships to strangers. The culture defines, what, in fact, is edible and what is not.

Food defines much of what is desirable in Italian life. Few people could tell you what people eat in Finland or how or if food symbolizes Finnish life (to chose an arbitrary example), but an astonishing number of people can provide those definitions in the case of Italy. So our focus is on culture: food is a center through which concentric circles of cultural meaning are organized.

There are many ways to look at culture, but we returned most often to a perspective that emphasizes the interplay between structure and improvisation. We approach this with the help of Ferdinand de Saussure, who in the early twentieth century defined *language* as "langue" and "parole."¹ In simple terms, *langue* is language as structure, the rules of grammar and definition of content, and *parole* is language as it is used.

We applied Saussure's structuralism metaphorically rather than literally. Tim Parks, a British author who has spent twenty-some years in Italy, described Italian culture as "anarchy outside" and "order inside"²—private life as carefully structured but public life as largely improvised. Social roles are clearly defined: one's profession is typically listed in the phone book and one is addressed by formal title (structure), yet the means by which one reaches a position in Italy are improvised and circuitous. There are traffic rules (structure), yet people drive in what seems to be madly improvised teamwork. The elaborate bureaucracies are structural labyrinths with no final and correct path; one improvises through their rules. One can even begin to think of Italy proper as a national structure and the local interpretations as improvisations on the theme.

If this metaphor describes Italy, the case of food is most interesting. There is a template for the meal that defines how food is eaten during the day, the week, and even the year. And within this structure improvisation takes place. If we may use a musical metaphor, it is as though Bach, master of contrapuntal techniques—a structure where precise rules allow two or more melodies to interact simultaneously—suddenly discovered John Coltrane and transformed the fugue to jazz. Food in Italy is organized with the complexity found in classical music, yet occasionally it does become jazz.

COMMENTS ON METHOD

Our book is a dialogue between two sociologists from the same generation,



Bologna, Piazza Maggiore. Our study is situated in the city of Bologna, an ancient city established several hundred years before Christ. It was the second most important city in Roman Italy and the fifth largest city in Europe in the thirteenth century. It is the site of the oldest university in Europe and a rich cuisine based on the prosperous dairy region that surrounds it. The people we studied live in the center city or just outside. Patrizia's flat is a few blocks from the piazza.

sharing similar intellectual interests. But Patrizia, as she tells in her “Digestivo,” would not have studied her culture's food; it was both too obvious and too inscrutable. She needed an outsider to ask the obvious questions. Why is the pig the animal of the south and the cow the animal of the north? Why is spaghetti made without eggs, and what would be so terrible about serving it with *ragù*? And on and on.

We began with informal interviewing, stimulated by dinners we shared during my early trips to Bologna. We planned an article, but it was quickly evident that our portrait needed a larger canvas. We needed to do fieldwork, to observe and interview. With seemingly little effort Patrizia arranged invitations for me to join families for lunch or dinner on more than ten fieldwork trips, usually lasting a week or two, extending over five years. I would often have ten research dinners in a seven-day week. I also lived in Italy for three months during that period and worked on the food study continually during that time.

We asked our subjects to prepare food just as they would normally, and most dinners or lunches were typical daily meals. We also were invited to dinner parties, some formal and others spontaneous, which we regard as another

kind of typical Italian meal. I was often the first American these Italians had met, and I spoke only rudimentary Italian during the bulk of the research. I smiled, ate, asked questions, and photographed.

Patrizia and I designed an open-ended questionnaire, which we adapted to different families. When my hosts spoke English or there was a translator present, I interviewed on the spot. More often Patrizia returned to the family to complete the interview, which she then transcribed and translated. We often did follow-up interviews, which were also transcribed, translated, and coded.

The book is written by Harper, guided by Faccioli. Cultural interpretation is difficult in any circumstances, and having two authors from different cultures interpret a culture inhabited by only one of them compounds the challenges. Our dialogue—by conversation, e-mail, book and article sharing, and other forms of communication—has been intense. At times we've disagreed about fundamental interpretations and have had to work hard to find a solution. I have come to think that we are both idealistic but about different things, and we are both hard-headed sociologists who delight in the discovery of an ironic twist to a taken-for-granted social reality.

As we proceeded, it became clear that the book was an example of cultural mentoring—an examination of Italian culture by an American, based on the teaching and direction of an Italian colleague. Faccioli is both chief informant and coauthor; Harper's voice provides the narrative thread.

We did our research in the homes of about twenty-five Bolognese families, and we dined with several of these families several times. These invitations came first from Faccioli's friends and family, but as the study became known, invitations also came from strangers. We sought families from different backgrounds in terms of social class, age, experience, and outlook and successfully located research families from the working class, professional backgrounds, and the elite of Bolognese society. Our sample included elderly Bolognese families that eat traditional cuisines and young avant-garde families that experimented with traditional forms. We studied the food cultures of traditional families, gay male and female families, and single mothers. We have not studied university students living on their own nor those who are at the lower end of the working class. And while we interviewed and ate with a wide range of Bolognese families, our subjects are more from the professional than the working classes.

As is natural with a small sample, we have tended to see each couple or each individual as representing a particular category. That can be troubling. Is Egeria, for example, the best example of an upper-class gourmand? Can Side represent all working-class Italian women who lived through the hard events of the mid-twentieth century? The answer is obviously not, but to Patrizia these individuals passed a commonsense test: they seem to represent what they are asked to. Each method, of course, has its shortcomings, but we have

confidence in our small, unstatistical sample. One could, of course, follow up with surveys and add even more intensive observations to further understand how food defines social life in Italy.

All but two of the people we studied are named accurately, as they wanted to be. To help the reader keep track of people with often similar names, we introduce them below. The list is arranged in chronological order.

GENERATION BORN 1920–40



MARCO AND SIDE (PRONOUNCED SEE'-DAY)

Marco and Side are married, with a son who lives nearby. They worked their way up from poverty to become owners of a small bar. Now retired, Side continues to work as a housecleaner. Side is an intense ball of energy. Marco is a small, dignified man who served as mediator between his mother and his wife for several decades.



FRANCESCA, (PATRIZIA), AGNESE

Francesca and Agnese are sisters, both widowed. Francesca and Agnese were young adults during World War II, and each was married for several decades. Agnese worked in politics in her adult life with her husband, both members of the Communist Party. During the war she was a Partisan. Francesca is mother of Patrizia and did not work outside the home. During the years of the research, Agnese rode a bus across town to see her sister nearly every day. Francesca is a thin, attractive woman with a sparkle in her eye; Agnese is dignified and reserved, serious where Francesca is the jokester.



LIBERA, (PINO), AND VITO

Libera and Vito have two sons. One is Pino, a researcher and filmmaker who is one of our key informants. Vito retired from the military; Libera had worked in the post office but is now retired. Vito is energetic, interested, warm, and sincere; Libera is matter-of-fact and highly competent in the kitchen. They make their home in Bologna, though they were born in southern Italy. Pino was born in the early 1960s.



(FRANCESCO AND CHIARA), AND ROBERTA AND DOMENICO, CHIARA'S PARENTS

Domenico, the family patriarch, is a warm and physical man; he grabs my arm when he talks to me. Roberta is a robust woman, master of her kitchen, and keen to answer my questions about cooking or the vineyard. In their early adulthood they purchased a several-hundred-acre vineyard, which has been their lifelong project and the center of family activities.

They have several children, including Chiara, born in the 1970s, married to Francesco. Their son is Domenico II. Chiara is also a key informant in our study.

GENERATION BORN 1940–60 (BABY BOOMERS)



EGERIA AND UGO

Egeria and Ugo, who have two daughters, are members of the Bolognese elite. Egeria has a special interest in Italian food and currently manages a Web-based business that introduces tourists to home-cooked Italian cuisine. She is an impressive woman, intellectual and ironic. We met only once, at her dinner party, but Patrizia knows her professionally.



MARIA AND COSTANTINO

Maria and Costantino are married with two sons. Both are educators and connoisseurs of Italian food and wine. In many ways they represent the pinnacle of Italian middle-class family life, with their devotion to the understanding and consumption of Italian cultural excellence.



ELENA, (LAURA), VINCENZO

Elena and Vincenzo have one daughter, Laura. They are retired, living in an elegant flat on the outskirts of Bologna, with a second home in Rimini. I dined at their home twice, experiencing interesting conversations and excellent dinners. They are quite content in their corner of Italy and seldom leave it.



CRISTINA AND SANDRO

Cristina and Sandro (no children) are professionals; both are warm, funny, and demonstrative.



FRANCO, (ANNA), LUCIA

Lucia and Franco have a son (Luca, who is not photographed) and a daughter (Anna), both university age during the study. Franco is a retired salesman; Lucia is a housewife. I had known Luca for several years but met his parents only when they invited me to lunch. They live in an elegant flat that seals them away from the noisy city, but they take full advantage of the cultural opportunities the city center offers.



PATRIZIA DUE, (DANIELE, NICOLA), MENOTTI, AND IL GATTO

Patrizia *due* (we call her this to distinguish her from Patrizia Faccioli) is married to Menotti, and they have two sons. Patrizia is a primary school teacher and Menotti is an engineer. They live on the outskirts of Bologna. The family resembles many families we met, but their attitude toward food is more utilitarian than many others'.



PINO AND MARA (AND PIERGIORGIO)

Mara and Dino (their one son, Piergiorgio, married to Stefania, is in his early thirties). Mara is a retired teacher and now works in real estate; Dino owns a fashionable clothing store in downtown Bologna. I had met Piergiorgio at the university; he invited me to the flat he shares with Stefania for lunch. We became friends and dined together several times. He also took me to the home of his father and mother, both about my age, for a typical family lunch.



PATRIZIA, RUSSELL, AND SILVIA

Silvia and Russell (married, no children) own a thematic tourist park near Bologna. Silvia has worked in the entertainment industry throughout her adult life; she and Patrizia have been friends for many years. Russell is a happily transplanted Californian who speaks Italian fluently.

YOUNGER GENERATION—BORN IN OR AFTER THE LATE 1950S



BASSANO (LEFT) AND GIORGIO

Bassano and Giorgio, both born in the late 1950s. A gay couple, both work in the service industry and were in their forties at the time of the research. Giorgio and Bassano live upstairs from Giorgio's mother in a stunning conversion of a sixteenth-century monastery. They often visit Giorgio's mother to eat, to wash dishes in her machine, or just to visit. Patrizia did not know Bassano and Giorgio before the research but asked them to participate in our study to help us understand how gay men manage domestic life.



DANI, MARI, AND PATRIZIA

Daniela (nicknamed Dani) and Marina (Mari), a gay couple, were born in the late 1950s and were in their forties at the time of the research. Dani works in social services, Marina in an insurance company. Marina is reserved and Dani outgoing, and their family food culture represents their different orientations. They live a few blocks from Patrizia's flat and spend much of their free time taking care of Christian, a special needs young man.



BARBARA AND CARLO

Barbara and Carlo, a working-class married couple, live on the edge of the city center of Bologna and are in their early forties. Carlo has a collection of Bruce Springsteen CDs and is a fan of American football; he follows the Pittsburgh Steelers and has their mementos on his wall. Barbara works in a butcher shop and is an excellent cook.



SILVIA AND ANDREA

Silvia (*due*) and Andrea, both researchers, come from the traditional elite of Bologna. Both understand Italian culture from a theoretical perspective as well as from their own lives.



STEFY AND PIERGIORGIO

Stefania (Stefy), as mentioned above, is the wife of Piergiorgio, the son of Dino and Mara. Stefy experiments with the tastes of several Italian regions in her own family cuisine. She and Piergiorgio were newly married at the time of the study.

People who were important to the study but were not photographed included Isabella, Giovanna, and Rita; Clara and Luigi; and several others.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND FIELDWORK

Patrizia and I met through our mutual interest in visual sociology, and this book is in part a result. We believe that photographs can describe social life and that visual sociology is a legitimate cousin to documentary photography and photojournalism. We do not, however, accept the naive realism that equates photos with truth. Like all photos, mine were constructed and gain their meaning in their use.

My goal was to photograph the ordinary, what Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari call the “rituals and necessities of ordinary life.”³ I photographed in a relaxed style, with a Leica or Mamiya 6, both quiet rangefinder cameras.

While I had thought it would be difficult to photograph people who I didn't know, by and large it was not, which I can only attribute to Italians' comfort with themselves and the informality and friendliness of Italian homes.

The photos fall into three categories. Some show the flow of normal activity: people preparing food, moving about in the house or outside, and eating. These photos read the culture through social interaction, gesture, touch, concentrating on how people occupy social spaces.

In other photos, people pose. They appear engaging and confident, which, I think, tells a lot about the culture.

I also photographed the insides of people's homes. These images show where food is prepared, the order or disorder in Italian homes, the places and arrangements for eating, and the tools people use as they make and consume food (utensils, stoves, and other objects).⁴

I photographed in black and white for several reasons. First, food's appeal and its symbolic meaning is often connected to its color, but that was not our topic. Rather, we wanted to understand how people prepare and consume food—in other words, the social life of the meal. Color could easily be distracting. For example, in one dinner party Maria wore a multihued dress that would have been the center of attention in a color photo, but in black and white the dress fades into the background. We are left to concentrate on the people, rooms, tools, and finally the food.

We also use historical photos to remind us what hunger looked like in war-ravaged Italy or how barefooted waifs were part of the pasta-making process in Naples a hundred years ago. I once wrote that finding the right historical image in an archive is like finding a nugget of gold in field of slag, and it was exactly like that on this project. I studied more than four thousand images from the Corbis-Bettman archive to locate the fourteen images included here. We hope that these photos provide a feel for the social change that Italy has undergone in the past century, as they show events and conditions that many of our subjects experienced.⁵

Our photos make the people in our study real. Not all people wanted to be photographed, and of course we respected those wishes. But most of the people who were involved with this study were pleased to be photographed and pleased to appear in the book as identifiable persons. We believe that we humanize them by showing their natural actions in normal environments, and we support a social science committed to communicating fully the realities it encounters.

VISUAL IDEAS AND FILM

Italian feature films tell important cultural stories of food, especially at in certain historical moments. For example, Vittorio De Sica's neorealist film *The*

Bicycle Thief tells how one man tries to support his family in a time of extreme poverty, and Roberto Rossellini's *Rome: Open City* tells how food was bought on the black market during the Nazi occupation of Rome. Italian films of the mid-1950s forced us to question the meaning of Italy's economic boom and the changes in attitudes toward food that it brought. Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* may be the darkest of these analyses of changing Italy, while Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* portrays the fate of a southern family who immigrates to northern Italy in search of a better life. Bernardo Bertolucci's 1976 film *1900* describes social life within the mezzadria system, as does Ermanno Olmi's 1979 *Tree of Wooden Clogs*. This list, of course, is the barest of introductions, but we make the point that, along with historians such as Peter Bondanella⁶ and filmmaker Martin Scorsese,⁷ feature films help us understand history and culture, including the social meanings of food.

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

We first discuss Italian food in the contexts of regional and national identity, scarcity and plenty, and the sacred and profane. We then turn to the study of love, power, and labor. These themes help us understand the motivation and organization that lies behind the creation of Italian meals. We explain how women's roles have evolved in recent history and how family members define their places in the family division of labor. This includes the study of Italian feminism and invites comparison with other models of Western family organization.

The second section of the book begins with the study of how Italians make food in both material and cultural ways. We next examine the role of structure in the organization of food-based social life and the simultaneous improvisation that it plays against. Finally, we explain how the people we studied vary in their dedication to cooking and in their commitment to regional cuisine. The project has a national and historical frame, but it is a study of Bologna, a city with an eclectic population and a very particular cuisine.

Our project came naturally to two sociologists long interested in culture and visual studies. We became better friends in the process, and I likely learned a lot more than Patrizia did. Yet Patrizia did pick up new perspectives, since it is unusual to have an outsider probe and pick away at your own culture. Since Italians seem so good-hearted about sharing their cultural secrets, I never felt myself to be in the bumbling outsider role that most field workers have to endure. I learned some good recipes in the process of fieldwork, and I look back at this research as the most pleasurable I've done.



A grandmother holds her grandchild, standing in the doorway of her farmhouse near Bologna, Italy, 1975. Photographer unknown.

Frames of Reference

REGIONALISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

REGIONALISM ASIDE, THERE IS A NATIONAL ITALIAN CULINARY CULTURE.

Albert Sonenfeld

HERE ARE SOME OF THE FEATURES OF ITALIAN HISTORY THAT SHOW THE PULL between national and regional identities:

- Italy became a nation only in 1860 but had had a continual sense of nationhood since Rome was a world power.
- Being the center of Catholicism since the fourth century (with a few interruptions) led to a universal religion in Italy, but local traditions and beliefs remained powerful.
- Italians have been a single “people” for thousands of years, but Italy was invaded again and again, colonized by northern and western European countries, and culturally influenced by Greece, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the East.
- There was no Italian language until the nineteenth century, but members of a small religious and political infrastructure spoke Latin throughout Italian history.
- The country had the geographical boundaries of mountains and the sea but was as varied internally as any comparable land mass could be. The daunting geography discouraged the movement of people, but the old Roman roads and the placid surrounding sea provided means for travel; people did move through Italy, communicating with improvised combinations of dialects and simplified Latin.
- While there was not a centralized political state until the late nineteenth century, city-states, kingdoms (often ruled by foreigners), and other local units generated regional political autonomy, which struggled against, or aligned with, the centralized Catholic Church, represented by the pope, and the Holy Roman Empire, situated in Germany.

So we begin: Italy as a nation—yes; and the profound impact of regionalism—yes, as well. Albert Sonenfeld writes: “The original characteristics of the country called Italy . . . cannot be encapsulated in the short, contentious history of the unified state but must be sought in the dense network of customs, habits, and styles of living that somehow distinguish an ‘Italian’ identity. Culinary practices and the culture of food are essential elements of this identity.”¹ In this universe of contradiction an Italian food culture developed, both regional and national. The traditional cuisine, simply put, was based on olive oil, wheat, and wine. Northern invaders added game meat, butter, lard, milk, and beer.² But regional differences were extreme: Venetian cuisine combined lagoon fish and shellfish with corn from inland trade and Asian spices. Coastal cities such as Venice and Genoa were conduits for food and spices from the East and Africa moving into northern Europe, and the trading cultures of those city ports brought wealth and new synthetic cuisines. These foods contrasted mightily with the ancient shepherd cultures in the isolated, economically backward south, where the Etruscan *cucina povera* prevailed; the rice-based cuisine of Lombardy; the dairy regions of the northwest; and the tuna, oil, and vegetable cuisine of Sicily. Water buffalo were imported from India to the coastal farmland south of Naples in the seventeenth century, and presto, *mozzarella di bufala*, a great cheese unique to that animal and the region where it prospered was born. So indeed, regional variation in Italy is extreme, and we’ve not even scratched the surface.

Ancient cookbooks, however, describe a national cuisine. One of the most important was written in the late fifteenth century by a scholar with the pen name of Platina, who was invited to Rome by Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan, a gourmand. There Platina met Maestro Martino de Rossi, cook to the cardinal. Martino was a native of Lombardy and was just arrived in Rome; the two outsiders became friends, and de Rossi became the muse for Platina’s food writing.

Platina worked side by side with the maestro, learning much more than recipes. His book *De honesta voluptate et valitudine* (On Honest Pleasures and Good Health)³ is considered the first modern Italian cookbook. After the invention of the printing press, it was plagiarized by the French and translated into all major European languages; it has stayed in press one way or another until the present. It is argued to have been the source of modern French cuisine.⁴ Bill Buford, a contemporary American writer, tells of eating in a trattoria in a small village near Parma, where a chef prepares local specialties: pumpkin ravioli and cured pork rear quarters. A student of Platina’s text, Buford suddenly realizes that he is eating slightly modified recipes five hundred years old and several regions away from Rome, where Platina recorded them.⁵

Capatti and Montanari point to other influential cookbooks with a national frame of reference, for example, Ortensio Lando’s 1448 *Commentario delle più notabili e mostruose cose d’Italia e d’altri luoghi* (Commentary on the Most



Stefy's copy of her grandmother's Artusi

Notable and Outlandish Things Found in Italy and Elsewhere), a fictional narrative in which the protagonist goes to different inns to eat delightful foods. He writes, for example, "I must not forget to mention that in Bologna they make the best sausages that man has ever tasted. They eaten either cured or cooked and are always appetizing. Bless the one who invented this sausage; I kiss and worship his virtuous hands." His book, in Capatti and Montanari's words, "covers a broad swath of Italy and reveals a sense of gastronomic belonging, a clearly defined identity."⁶

These books were some of the more famous predecessors of Pellegrino Artusi's *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiare bene* (*The Science of Cooking and the Art of Eating Well*), published at the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ Artusi's book is made up of common recipes, drawn from all regions of Italy. It has had more than one hundred printings in Italy, and nearly all the people we interviewed had a copy on their shelf. Often these books were treasured objects, though changing ingredients and names of ingredients make them hard to use today. Stefania showed me her ancient copy, a precious repository of her beloved grandmother's recipes, more an heirloom than a practical guidebook in her own cooking.

Patrizia and I spent several hours studying hers, also a treasured family heirloom. Many of Artusi's terms have disappeared, some meats are now seldom eaten, cooking methods have changed, and steps in the meal sequence have disappeared. The categories that organize the book are odd to a modern reader. Yet it is a fascinating study of an effort to define a national Italian cuisine.

Artusi's book contains more than seven hundred recipes, with an appendix providing "cuisine for weak stomachs." He first lists broths, gelatins, and sauces (six recipes, featuring tomatoes and meat), followed by *minestre in brodo* (all kinds of first plates that are soups) and *minestre asciutte* ("dry" pasta including spaghetti, *maccheroni*, *tagliatelle*, and such), with nearly a hundred recipes.

He then describes *principii*, the first dishes, or *primi piatti*. These are twelve in number, including *crostini* (fried pasta dough served with accoutrements—a cornerstone of Bolognese fare, where it is called *crescentine*) and *bruschetta* (the familiar dried bread).

Recipes for sauces, mayonnaise, *besciamella*, green sauce (pesto), and others follow. Then there are thirteen egg recipes, including *frittate* and omelets. *Sfoglia*, the pasta sheet that is cut into several forms of pasta, is described in detail. Stuffing for pasta or fowl follows. Artusi groups all fried foods in a single category; he lists a single recipe for boiled meat (chicken) and defines the largely obsolete category of *tramezzi*, dishes served between the first and second courses (these include *maccheroni*, *gnocchi*, sausage, pie, and ricotta).

There are more than a hundred recipes for *umidi*, or stewed meat, from chicken and pigeon to tripe. Then there are recipes for meat eaten cold (such as tuna, Sicilian) followed by just over thirty recipes for roasted meats. Next are *pasticcerie*—small cakes, like cookies, that you eat with your hands—and nearly a hundred recipes for *contorni*, the side dish of vegetables served to accompany the second plate of meat or fish. There are many fish recipes, which include recipes for other animals that live in the water, including frogs. Lagoon species common to Venice, including prawns, lobsters and clams, are oddly missing. Artusi describes desserts and sweets including tortes, mascarpone, syrups, and marmalade. He concludes his collection with recipes for liquors, coffee, and ice cream.

To the modern eye it is an odd compendium, but it showed Italians how to be Italian through food no matter where they lived. The Italian food historian Carol Helstosky writes: "Artusi's impact—to bring Italians together through a shared language about food preparation and shared practice of food consumption—would take years to develop, but his formula of middle-class sobriety, simplicity of presentation, and attention to regional difference proved to be the right formula for a national cuisine."⁸

Artusi created a template for a national cuisine, but his work did not eliminate regionalism; if anything it gave it a context in which to exist.

Our study is both regional and national, and to provide proper context for the regional aspects we should tell a little about this city of Bologna and its geographical setting, Emilia-Romagna. We recommend Biba Caggiano's cookbook to those English-speaking gourmands who want to learn to cook the foods of Bologna.⁹

Emilia-Romagna is bordered on the north by the Po River (the largest in Italy, flowing from northwest to southeast) and by the Apennines Mountains on the south. Emilia-Romagna is fifty to seventy miles wide at the northwestern end, widening to about a hundred miles of coast on the Adriatic Sea. It is about 250 miles long, the shape of an eggplant with its end cut off. Down the center is the ancient Roman road Emilia, along which runs the straightest and one of the busiest *autostradas* in Italy. It is a hundred-mile traffic jam on summer weekends as the population escapes the hot plains for the seaside.

It is the most fertile region in Italy. Medieval cities adjoined the Roman road: starting at the sea, we have Rimini, now a resort for Italians (birthplace of Federico Fellini, who portrayed the town as a provincial backwater in his film *I Vitelloni*). Next is Forlì, a university town, and then we come to Bologna, site of the oldest university in Europe and known for its red politics and rich food. Further upriver is Modena, famous for *aceto balsamico di Modena*—most precious vinegar of Italy—and Reggio nell' Emilia, where the “queen of Italian cheeses,” *parmigiano*, is made. Nearby is Parma, home of the most revered *prosciutto* in Italy. In the foothills to the south are terraced vineyards, including Roberta and Domenico's, which produce Sangiovese di Romagna.

The plains of Emilia-Romagna could be Iowa with ancient stone buildings instead of industrial metal barns. It is hot and muggy in the summer and often densely foggy in the winter. Wandering through the porticoes of Bologna (there are thirty miles of these covered sidewalks in the city) in the winter fog can get you hopelessly lost, but in the heat of summer they protect you from the sun. Because the streets adjoin at odd angles (Bologna is circular, with main streets radiating out from the central piazza to the ancient ring road), the shadows of the portico columns and arches reshape themselves block by block. There is little wind in the region, and blue skies in the fall and spring are welcome respites from summer haze and winter overcast. The weather is, at least for a Minnesotan (Harper), more suited for crops than for human habitation, but that is the point. Emilia-Romagna is about growing food.

The two regions of Emilia-Romagna have very different cuisines: the seacoast (Romagna) features soups, lighter fare, and fish. It is hard to believe, but one seldom finds the stuffed pastas and lasagnas of Bologna in seacoast trattorie fifty miles to the east. Caggiano says the food of Romagna is more experimen-



Bologna, city center, from one of the few remaining medieval towers. There were once more than two hundred of these phallic symbols of feudal privilege in the city. In the western distance are the agricultural lands of Emilia-Romagna.

tal; the recipes of Emilia (Bologna-Parma-Modena) are rigid, and the food is rich (Bologna *la grassa, la rossa, la dotta*—the fat, the red, the learned). The famous foods of Bologna include lasagna, stuffed pastas, in particular tortellini and ravioli; sausages (most famously mortadella); pasta made fresh with eggs; *ragù* made with pork; ice cream, milk, and butter from local cows. To this add northern vegetables (squash and pumpkin as ravioli stuffing), the vinegar from Modena, and, in varied forms, *prosciutto* and *parmigiano*.

In this verdant plain, where Patrizia has spent her entire life, we situate our study. It is the site of a regional cuisine that was used in varied ways by the families we studied.

SCARCITY AND PLENTY

We asked Agnese and Francesca, born in the 1920s, to tell us about food they ate as children. Agnese remembered: “You know at one time people made polenta over the table [on a large piece of wood, *tagliere*], . . . and every person sitting around the table ate his own piece. Every house in the country had this big *tagliere* for polenta. The polenta is cooked until it is dense, and it is eaten with sauce. In Emilia Romagna it is eaten with *ragù*, or with pieces of sausage,

or with mushrooms, or with tender, soft cheeses. There is a famous old joke about a family around the table with polenta and a sardine was hanging over the table, and everyone touched the sardine to get the taste of the sardine . . . and Pierino, who is the boy who gets into a lot of trouble . . . when it is his turn he touches the sardine two times, and the father looks at him and said: ‘Pierino, do you want to explode?’”

Patrizia asks, “So in the past polenta was a main dish?”

“Yes, yes. In the past it was, because it was a way to fill your stomach. Today it is a feast!”

For a historical perspective on scarcity and abundance, we begin with Rome at its height—center of the world, rich and indulgent. Pre-Roman Etruscans had a diet based on local products: olive oil, vegetables, sheep cheese and yogurt,¹⁰ and this was the cornerstone of the Roman cuisine, continuing to this day.

The glory that became Rome, however, was based on food imported from the far reaches of the world mixed with the plentiful resources at hand. The Mediterranean was bountiful; Romans feasted on seafood, including species now extinct or uncommon. Their environment was rich in vegetables, with a long growing season, hot sun, good soil, and adequate rain. Romans had a love affair with the artichoke and the zucchini (and zucchini flowers), as they do still.¹¹ They ate cabbages, asparagus, beans, beets, cucumbers, lentils, melons, onions, peas.¹² Fruit was grown locally or imported from far reaches of Italy—apples, pears, plums, quinces, peaches, apricots, cherries—and pomegranates and other exotic fruits were imported from the East. Salads were made from locally grown greens and dressed with olive oil. Then as now, Romans had an appreciation for sweets and used spices such as anise, fennel, mint, mustard, poppy seed, and garlic in common recipes. Rome’s bread-based diet required imported wheat from Africa; Ostia, twenty miles west of Rome, was a busy seaport, as excavated ruins now make clear.

Then as now, pork was the favored meat, made into sausages, bacon, and hams. The meat was imported from mountainous regions (including the Apennine adjacent to Bologna), where vast herds of pigs did quite well in vast oak forests with their bountiful acorn crops. Other meats, including beef, rabbit, venison, boar, mutton, and fowl—including ducks, chicken, peacocks, and songbirds—were available, some expensive and others cheap and rough.¹³ Wine was the daily drink for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, of varying strength (often watered) and quality.

Simply put, at its most powerful Rome was able to gather the resources of the known world for the plates of its citizens. Gastronomy was both a science (the basis of health) and an art, as Epicurean philosophers argued that “the

true, the beautiful, and the good” are to be appreciated through the indulgence of the senses. The result was the tradition of the feast, with excesses that continue to stretch our imaginations. This was the food for those at the pinnacle of society, but since there were not restaurants in the modern sense in ancient Rome, people often ate in each other’s homes, and the social webs of power and influence were built and maintained around the table.

What of the poor? The basic diet was a coarse bread, or wheat or barley porridge (the term *puls* evolved to *polenta*, or corn gruel), to which Romans added what vegetables they had, or parts of animals left over from religious sacrifices.¹⁴ The bread was ranked by quality, and the finest loaves were white and sweet. The bread of the poor was coarse and brown but nutritionally superior. But the vast wealth of Roman society produced sufficient food for all, though at quite different levels of quality, variety, and taste.

By the Middle Ages, Rome had declined from a city of several million to a forgotten city of thirty to forty thousand herders and farmers living in the ruins of an abandoned civilization. Farmers grew root crops in the Tiber flood silt; the elaborate diet of ancient Rome was replaced with older, simpler Etruscan shepherd and swineherd recipes. Downie calls this menu “the base upon which the Roman peasant cooking of the Middle Ages and succeeding periods, broadly called *cucina povera* (poor people’s food), was built.”¹⁵ He cites Caterina Napoleon, who calls it “siege-cooking,” developed by people “cut off from the rest of Italy for centuries, [who] fed on whatever they could grow or gather within Rome’s towering walls.”¹⁶ As Italy evolved from a world empire with Rome at the center to a nation to a complex regional entity, the southern regions developed more slowly. Differing agricultural systems (the northern sharecropping, or *mezzadria*, and the southern *latifondia*) explain much of the variation between the wealthier north and the poorer south. There were also more natural resources in the north, and the south had less arable land, fewer forests, less rain, fewer rivers, and, until relatively recently, malarial swamps. Most agree that it was primarily the agricultural systems—the means through which food was produced and distributed—that were responsible for the relative wealth and poverty of the north and south.¹⁷

In the *mezzadria* system of the north (the term derives from *mezzo*, indicating the half of the crop that peasants gave their landlords), peasants lived on farming estates, called *fattorie*, which were divided into peasant farms (*poderi*), “each with its own land, stone cottage, well, bread oven and stable—everything necessary to support a family while its members labored to produce crops.”¹⁸ The landowner—an urban entrepreneur, a local nobleman, or the church—provided the land, the housing, oxen for plowing, a plow, and other equipment. The peasants produced the crop and distributed half to the landowner.

The peasants had to live on the estate to protect it, and they were expected to be self-sufficient.

Peasants typically supplied the landowner with game and poultry and agreed to improve the estate with ditches, channels, and plantings of olive or mulberry trees. Peasants had access to pasture for their animals, small plots on which they grew their subsistence and limited crops for the market. Contracts between peasants and owners typically were set for four years but could commit both parties for more than a generation. They were complex contracts, several pages long, and required the involved parties or their representatives to be literate. In this system peasants were relatively secure, as they had access to varied food of their own cultivation as well as to their share of the crops they grew for the landlords. For these reasons the sharecropping system was more amenable to endurance in times of bad harvests than was land renting.

Mezzadri farmers helped each other in periods of heavy work, in particular during the harvest (*aiutarelle*, from *aiutare*, to help, were the informal work exchanges). They visited between estates in winter months. Women, who did not work the fields, were skilled in weaving, broom making, animal husbandry, and, of course, food preparation. The result was a high degree of social integration, a strong peasant culture of self-reliance and solidarity.

Two modern films dramatize the *mezzadria* experience. Bernardo Bertolucci's 1976 *Novecento* (1900) portrays the contrasting fates of an illegitimate peasant son, raised communally by *mezzadria* farmers, and the landlord's son, born on the same day in 1900. The film depicts peasants who shared work, economic and political fate, and culture. Ermanno Olmi's 1978 *L'albero degli zoccoli* (*Tree of Wooden Clogs*) focuses on a year on a *mezzadria* estate. The scenes relevant to our discussion show a grandfather secretly planting tomatoes to be first to market, and the father of a young boy, sent to school on the encouragement of the priest, cutting down a landlord's tree to make shoes for his son. For this the family is banished, and the film ends as they trudge into the unknown with their belongings on their back. Thus the *mezzadria* system, though promoting peasant interests and culture to a certain extent, sanctified the power of the landlord.

At best the landlord was fair within the definitions of the system; at worst he was a tyrant. One version of the landlord-peasant relationship is described in Silverman's record of a harvest meal at the end of the threshing on a *mezzadria* estate in 1960. Here we see the class deference built into the ritual of the harvest meal:

A member of the landowner's family attended the threshing. He arrived at the farm by automobile and was greeted deferentially by the peasant family, the neigh-

bors of surrounding farms (there as part of the *aiutarella* exchange), and other friends and relatives of the family. . . . Some twenty men worked at the threshing machine, while the women prepared the food for the day and carried wine and water to the men. The *padrone* [landlord] sat in the shade and presided over the scales. As each sack was filled from the thresher, two men carried it to the scales, and the *padrone* adjusted the quantity of grain in the sack to equal one quintal. The filled sacks were set aside. All present kept count of the number of sacks and speculated on the final number, lamenting over the poor prospects in comparison with last year's abundant harvest. The *colono* of the farm [the chief peasant] did not work himself but he assigned tasks, oversaw the threshing, and observed the weighing. When 100 quintals were obtained, a loud whistle was sounded from the thresher, a signal for jubilation and renewed effort. . . . When the threshing was done, the whistle sounded again. When the men rested in the shade and joked with each other, the *padrone* calculated the division in the presence of his *fattore* [the individual who administered the farms for the landlord], the *colono*, and an educated adult son of the peasant family. . . . There followed a festive dinner provided by the peasant family. The *padrone* sat at the head of the table with the *fattore*, members of their families, honored guests, and the man in charge of the thresher. The *colono* and the neighbor men sat at a low table in a shed. The women served and later ate together in the kitchen.¹⁹

The agricultural systems in the south could hardly be more different. In the early modern period, the regions from Rome southward, to and including Sicily and Sardinia, were colonies of Spain and later France. The resources of the colonies were extracted by exploited workers and exported. Nearly all land was held in *latifondi* estates owned by individuals or institutions such as the church. These vast tracts were worked almost entirely by day laborers. The system did not encourage investment or innovation, and monocropping depleted the soil. It was possible to grow wheat, but it was too hot to grow the typical cereals (oats and barley) used for animal foods. The result was that there were few oxen or horses available for heavy work, and little animal waste available for fertilizer. Humans were the beasts of burden.

Peasants were landless laborers, living in towns adjoining the estates. Whole families shared a dank room, or they lived in shacks or even caves; the men gathered in village squares each day to compete for work. Unlike the peasants of the *mezzadria*, they had no stake in the land they worked, no plots for small gardens, no common lands to graze a few animals, and no security. When they rented land, they borrowed at high rates of interest from the landlord, and when land was sharecropped, peasants received only a quarter of the produce rather than the half share that was customary in the north. These conditions promoted intense commitment to family (the only support system), mistrust between peasants, and hatred for those with land, power, and money.

Eighty percent of Sicilian farmland was run under the *latifondo* system, and most of the remaining Italian south. With its low productivity, the land was not sufficient to support even the local population, and the system survived only because people emigrated.

The south was suited, however, for sheepfarming, and in the early modern period some single-owner companies owned more than a million sheep. These animals had to be moved between mountain locations in the summer and warmer plains in the winter, and peasants were employed as sheepherders, living outside for months at a time, or were forced out of agriculture when the land they depended upon was turned into sheep pasturage. The extensive grazing, in turn, was environmentally destructive.

Other factors retarded southern development. As mentioned, malaria was common, and the swamps were not drained until the twentieth century, in some of the most successful fascist public works projects. Local secret societies that evolved into organized crime families protected peasants from larger political units (colonial governments or the central state after 1861), and these traditions were one source of Italian organized crime.²⁰

While we regard the *mezzadria* system in more favorable terms than the *latifundi* system, we remember that in times of famine, plague, or other catastrophes, the *mezzadria* system broke down and peasants starved. Still, several writers (focusing on northern peasants) describe how peasants were able to create elaborate cuisines even in those hardest of times. Sonenfeld, for example, writes that

elaborate culinary preparation is [not] . . . the exclusive prerogative of the ruling classes. Inventiveness thrives not only in circumstances of power and wealth but also in poverty and necessity. At bottom, the most fascinating aspect of studying culinary history is the discovery of how ordinary people, with their physical effort and imagination, sought to transform the pangs of hunger and anxieties of poverty into potential moments of pleasure. The techniques devised in times of famine to render edible even the most basic resources of the land—the ability to make bread out of wild berries and grape seeds, recounted in so many medieval and modern chronicles, or to concoct a soup with roots from the underbrush and herbs from the ditches—all clearly testify to the difficulties of people whose daily lives were constantly threatened by the outbreak of catastrophe. But they also bear witness to the mental resources of a population capable of believing in the future even in times of great hardship, armed mainly with experience, ability, and imagination—or, in a word, with *culture*. . . . In an account of the terrible famine that afflicted Italy in 1338, we read: “The poor were eating thistles cooked with salt and wild herbs. They would cut leeks and the roots of milk thistles and cook them with mint.” How can we deny that this qualifies as culinary art?²¹



"Rest period during the grape harvest, Tuscany, 1930, photographer unknown."

These facing photographs describe the northern *mezzadria* versus the southern *latifondi* system. The grape harvesters are in Tuscany, a *mezzadria* area, and are harvesting crops they don't own but are entitled to a share of. They live on the estate, plant their own vegetables nearby, and likely pasture a few animals on the landlord's land. On their lunch break they help themselves to grapes they harvest and wine they made the year before.

The man in the background on the left appears to be the owner or, more likely, the *fattore*, the agent of the landlord.

There are many food stories in the early modern era: the introduction of corn-based polenta in the north; the beginning of rice cultivation in Lombardy and its subsequent use as flour as well as risotto; the importance of the forests to provision peasants with wild game and nuts; the continual importance of small independent farms who existed on the edges of large agricultural systems. But we shift our focus to the modern era, that is, the time of Italy's political consolidation and the events experienced by the people we studied.

Italy's economy declined in the nineteenth century, which led to chronic food shortages that lasted until the 1950s. The population was too large for the agricultural system; surplus food was inefficiently stored or distributed; the government taxed agriculture and food and encouraged production for export, even in the face of shortages.²²

We know a great deal about these times because Italian social science, well developed in the nineteenth century, focused on social problems such as food



"Peasant Women and Children, 1947, Puglia. Photographer unknown."

This photo contrasts with the image opposite. Puglia was composed almost entirely of *latifondi* estates, and these peasants were likely the wives and children of landless day laborers, with no share of the crops they grew, nor rural housing where they could grow their own crops or animals.

scarcity. Inadequate food was tied to poor intellectual and physical development and thus to retarded national development. Surveys showed that workers did not have sufficient caloric intake to do their work energetically or at all. For example, a study done by an anthropological society in 1872 "found that in 488 *comuni* (towns) in all regions of Italy, the majority of Italians consumed polenta, rice, pasta, or chestnuts. For the poor, wheat bread was as rare as meat."²³

There was great poverty in the cities as well. In 1884 in Naples, for example, the poor begged for used pasta water.²⁴ Angelo Mosso, a medical doctor from Turin, wrote in 1891 of "his utter disbelief upon viewing military conscripts assembled for medical inspection: 'there was in front of me a row of naked young men: some were dark and thin and between these were others who were large, pale, and white, like they were of another race. They were the poor and the rich.'²⁵ The polenta diet that the northern poor depended upon led to plagues of pellagra, a dreadful disease caused by niacin deficiency.

The poverty is reflected in common terms and phrases. *Uomo di panza* (man with belly) indicated someone who had triumphed over adversity, and a *uomo grasso* (fat man) was a man of importance. *Pane e appetito* denotes a meal of “bread and appetite”; *pane e coltello* denotes a meal of “bread and a knife.” In Calabria, among the poorest regions of southern Italy, it was common to “marry lunch and dinner.”²⁶

Italy began to industrialize in the early twentieth century, and Italy’s first factories made pasta, canned tomatoes, and other processed foods for export to Italians abroad. This was the beginning of industrial wealth as well as a modern cuisine, based on ancient roots of oil, wheat, wine, vegetables (the tomato!), and pork.

Italy’s abundant food during World War I was due to the largesse of the Allies, who provided direct aid in the form of wheat shipments. The wheat shipments ended when the war was over, and the liberal government’s unwillingness to continue the bread subsidy led to chaos and mass uprisings including “the largest agricultural strike in Italian history,” in which more than 500,000 Tuscan peasants rose up against landlords and the government’s failure to address the food crises. Italy was in its first years of democracy, but the riots led to countrywide instability, which, in turn, led to twenty-three years of fascism.²⁷ The king invited Mussolini to power, choosing the order of a dictator over the chaotic will of the people.

FASCISM

It is at this point that the earliest experiences of our oldest subjects enter the picture. Francesca and Agnese were teenagers during the 1930s, and several others were young children. They were formed during the years of fascism or remember its aftermath, World War II.

In the fascist era (1922–45), food and diet continually preoccupied the government, but the influence of fascism on Italian cuisine was contradictory. Mussolini extolled peasant life but set forces in place that nearly destroyed it; for example, his “Battle for Grain” replaced the peasants’ multicrop system with industrially organized wheat farming. In the process agriculture was modernized: draft animals were replaced with tractors, and hand flailing (an inefficient method of separating the chaff from the wheat, used for centuries) was replaced with mechanized threshers and combines. Elizabeth Romer, who lived near an agricultural estate in an isolated region of Tuscany, noted that “under Mussolini communal threshing machines were introduced which were hauled into the town piazzas, and the corn [she likely means wheat] was brought into the cities for the *cittadini* (the urban poor) to thresh for their own bread.”²⁸ Mussolini’s policies made Italy sufficient in wheat production and in doing dis-

placed rural workers, increased rural poverty, and drove peasants to the city. Monocropping subsequently brought to Italy the same environmental problems as in other modern agricultural systems.²⁹

Mussolini prodded Italians to eat less (his own vegan diet was as an example) and promoted foods produced in Italy. The ideal fascist diet was based on carbohydrates, fresh produce, beans, olive oil, citrus, and wine, and it deemphasized meat. Mussolini devoted a great deal of propaganda to the matter, writing poems about the virtues of bread and publicly celebrating the beginning of the annual wheat harvest. He wanted to present himself and the Fascist Party as benevolent providers while at the same time discouraging a consumer society of capitalist decadence.³⁰ In Mussolini's words, from 1933, "[Fascism] preached duties not rights; hard work and sacrifice, not facile triumphs."³¹

Especially after the invasion of Ethiopia in 1936, Italy underwent deep food shortages. Though price controls were in place during most of the 1930s, food costs represented a large percentage of disposable income. For example, in 1938 the average industrial wage was 11 cents an hour. At this time eggs cost 41 cents a dozen, cheese 32 cents a pound, butter 40 cents a pound, olive oil 40 cents a liter, and milk 6.4 cents a liter.³² Said another way, it took a working-class laborer four hours' wages to purchase a dozen eggs, three hours' labor to buy a pound of cheese, nearly four hours to purchase a pound of butter or a liter of olive oil, and two hours to purchase a gallon of milk. Per kilogram of meat consumption dropped more than 20 percent between 1926 and 1937.³³ Carol Helstosky suggests that "one of the most visceral ways Italians experienced fascism was through their empty stomachs."³⁴

Yet in the countryside, especially on the *mezzadria* estates, there was often sufficient food. One of peasants studied by Carole Counihan remembers fascism thus:

We ate really well. Food wasn't abundant the same way it is today, but we ate well. First of all we had chickens and rabbits, all these kinds of things, as much as we wanted. . . . We had a garden with everything that there could possibly be . . . so much. Beans, squashes, in season, out of season, always, everything there was that could be useful to a family. So many vegetables. Everything. Beans and chickpeas. We harvested our own legumes. We had so many artichokes. We had an artichoke bed . . . so long as from here way down to there. We ate artichokes in every imaginable way. . . . We also had milk cows and as much milk as we wanted. Oh, that milk. Cheese, no.³⁵

Another peasant, born in 1930, remembered:

When there was so much poverty, people ate what the earth gave them. If it was the period of tomatoes, they ate so many tomatoes. They ate them fried, they ate

them stuffed, they ate them with eggs. Then when tomatoes were finished, there were string beans. So they ate those in sauce, boiled, or in a frittata. . . . Then string beans finished and peas began, then asparagus, then artichokes. In these parts there are so many artichokes. People invented spaghetti with artichokes, risotto with artichokes, fried artichokes, eggs with artichokes, stuffed artichokes. You can eat them a thousand ways, but they are always artichokes, for heavens sake. However, they take on a thousand different flavors. . . . This is what the seasons mean for me, and this is important. You eat what the earth, what nature, gives you.⁸⁶

The fascist diet reflected sacrifice and good nutrition. Necessity rather than choice forced Italy into culinary restraint, however, and during much of the fascist era the nation teetered on the brink of food catastrophes.

WORLD WAR II

World War II devastated Italy. After the Allied invasion of Sicily and Italy's withdrawal from the war, the Germans occupied the country and fought Allied soldiers as they advanced mile by mile, producing a year and a half of continual combat. As the Nazi army retreated, it destroyed roads, bridges, and dams and thus set back the full modernization of agriculture while extending Italy's desperate conditions to well past the war's end. Because much of the fighting took place in the south, it damaged what was already a more primitive agricultural system.

Bologna, an important transportation hub and center of Nazi administration, was bombed extensively by the Allies. At the same time Nazis hunted down and killed hundreds of Bolognese Partisans and people who protected them.

"I had been under the first bombardment," Francesca remembers, "which lasted all the morning and part of the afternoon. I was at my friend Lora's house. So she said, 'Let's go to my basement, that is very old and very strong, with a high ceiling.' But I did not know that on the first floor there was an office of the German military district, and they [the U.S. intelligence] knew the smallest things. The first bomb I heard fell just right there. We were in the last room of the basement, and all the other rooms collapsed except for ours. We remained there from ten in the morning until four p.m. People were running around telling them, 'We are going to come to save you,' but because there were many dead and wounded we had to wait. At the end they came to rescue us with a ladder. This was the first bombardment of Bologna in July 1944."

Agnese adds, "In 1944 I met Romeo and joined the Partisans. My task was to typewrite all the information for the directors of the movement. All the day I was typewriting all the news of the actions—what the Partisans did, both in the mountains and in the cities; I had to typewrite in ten copies. Every morning this information arrived and it had to be diffused.



“Feasting on food furnished by the Allied Military Government, this Italian family has their first meal in three days. The tide of battle flowed over them in the Cori area of Italy. June 22, 1944.” Photograph by U.S. Army Signal Corps, photographer unknown.

“One morning, through the windows in the house where I worked we saw trucks carrying fascists, and they came out of the trucks like locusts! We were very frightened. There was an attic; we used a ladder to quickly climb there and hide all the papers. They came to the building to arrest a Partisan, and they didn’t know that we were in the top floor. He was a student in the university; his lover was a fascist spy.” Agnese pauses. “I was very frightened seeing the fascists coming down from these trucks.”

The war brought extreme shortages: rationed bread made with strange flours of wood pulp and other more edible but unsavory ingredients. Cookbooks published during the war described béchamel sauce without butter and little milk; mayonnaise made from flour, water, and egg whites; meatballs with pretend meat. Women ensured their family’s survival by stealing farmers’ crops, dealing on the black market, or bargaining with others in the same plight. All parts of the population were touched. Forty percent polled by University of

Trieste's statistics department suffered hunger "in the full physiological sense of the word."⁸⁷

It was most difficult in the cities, and particularly in Rome, which was occupied by Germans for eight months in 1943. The privations and the black market serve as a backdrop for Roberto Rossellini's 1945 *Rome: Open City*, which was filmed during and just after the war on location in Rome.

Biba Caggiano introduces her cookbook of recipes of Emilia-Romagna with memories of the war years in Bologna:

My brother, sister and I grew up during the Second World War. We lived in a two-hundred-year-old five-story apartment building facing one of the most beautiful cobblestone squares of Bologna, Piazza San Domenico. . . . Sometimes, touched by the glory of a beautiful summer day, we would forget briefly about the war that was raging all around us, about the bombs falling in the middle of the night, about the cold, dark cellar of our apartment building where our family took refuge, and we would pretend that the war had ended, that no planes were bombing our cities, and our lives had returned to normality. . . . Those were years of extreme frugality, where one pot of bean soup fed us for days, and polenta was a mainstay because it was filling and inexpensive.

Occasionally, eggs, flour, and a few scrawny chickens could be found and were quickly transformed into almost luxurious dishes by the magic hands of my mother. Our kitchen, which, because of its large black wood-burning oven, was the only warm room of the house, became our sanctuary. It was where we congregated, talked about our hopes, and expressed our fears. Among all the disarray and destruction, the food my mother cooked was the only stable part of our lives. It was in that large unadorned kitchen that I first stirred the sauce and the polenta. It was there that I helped my mother make the soup, and stuffed myself with roasted chestnuts. It was also there that I learned to love food, because its preparation often was the only carefree moment of our day.⁸⁸

Francesca and Agnese remember food shortages during the war. "There was the ration card," Francesca tells us, "and you had to stand in line to get a little bit of meat, a little bit of bread. See, everything was rationed, but I don't know exactly how because we didn't use it. Our mother had to get the food, so we didn't know the details. And then in the war we were evacuated from Bologna to the mountains, to Borgo Tossignano. And there things were different. But in the town people died from starvation. For example, all Emma's [their sister-in-law Patrizia's aunt] family who did not go around to find food lost weight and became ill."

"Yes," Agnese remembers, "and Emma's twin sister died from starvation. They suffered terribly."

Francesca says, "Those who lived with only the ration card could die."

Patrizia asks if there was also the black market.

"Yes, there was the black market," her mother replies, "but not everyone could buy from the black market because the prices were very, very high."

"Our mother went to Bazzano," Agnese recalls, "in the country, by horse and carriage. It was where she was born, and where she found food. She brought home everything, and we never lacked anything."

Francesca agrees, "Not anything! We didn't suffer at all!"

"We didn't perceive the hardship," Agnese says. "We gave the bread as gifts."

"But there wasn't butter; there was no oil; there wasn't coffee," Francesca continues, "there was just chicory coffee that was terrible, but lacking real coffee we drank it. And the farmers tried to take advantage of this. Can I tell about this? One day a woman farmer knocked on the door, with blocks of butter to sell, telling us that they had made them. So we bought three blocks. When I opened them, they were all green, moldy. Who knows what it was made of! But we did not throw it away; we fried food in it to save what we could. So in this way we ate!"

Iris Origo's memoir describes rural Tuscan life during the war.³⁹ British by birth, Origo married a wealthy Roman and during the 1930s purchased a *mezzadria* estate in Tuscany, near Montepulciano. The Origos were enlightened landlords, improving land, encouraging their tenant-peasants to adopt modern farming techniques such as crop rotation and fertilization. For several months in 1944 the war front lingered just to the south of their estate, which had become an orphanage, and then the war swept through their farm. Retreating Nazis stole what food they could and destroyed what they could not carry. Refugees from cities under siege flooded the countryside. Partisans hid in the hills and had to be fed. Productivity on the farms ceased as the war churned by. Yet Origo tells of peasants with *prosciutti* hidden in secret cellars; sufficient wheat for bread and pasta; eggs and fowl. Her account shows how the war destroyed infrastructure like roads, ditches, canals, field terracing, how it drafted, injured, and killed workers, and how it drained the system of its surplus.

POSTWAR POVERTY AND PLENTY

By the end of the war, Italy was one of the poorest countries of Europe. The rationed food available per person was 1160 calories in 1941 and dropped to 990 by 1944.⁴⁰ Most Italian agriculture remained a peasant system based on sharecropping, land rent, and daily labor. After the war, peasants from across Italy agitated for land reform, access to land owned by deposed fascist landowners, and, more simply, food and jobs. In different parts of the country these movements had different characters: in Sicily the Mafia reasserted its power (Mussolini had driven the Mafia underground in the 1920s and 1930s) as an ally



"Peasant Rising Spreads Throughout Italy . . . Farmworkers seize uncultivated land. Police in their Jeeps watch columns of peasants pass by on their way to 'claim' some of the untilled land. Under the sign of the hammer and sickle 'braccianti' (occasional farm workers) are staking their symbolic claims to the land left untilled by the owners. 1947." (Original caption.) Photographer unknown. During this era the Mafia, which had been brutally repressed during the fascist era, worked alongside the Christian Democratic Party and even the church in violently repressing left-wing peasant movements.

to the landlord class and the Christian Democratic Party;⁴¹ in the north there was a strong communist movement, and land reform was part of widespread movements for social justice.

At this unpromising moment Italy created, in the 1950s and 1960s, what is now referred to as an "economic miracle." It was a transition that disrupted and redefined Italian culture. One of the fundamental features was migration from south to north and from the country to the industrial city.⁴² The industrialization of agriculture eliminated not only the peasant class but also migrant agricultural workers, who had harvested, for example, the rice crop in the north (their story is told in Giuseppe De Santis's 1948 neorealist classic *Bitter Rice*).

The creation in the 1950s and 1960s of an urban middle class, to which most of the subjects of our study belong, was part of Italy's overall transformation. The changing food world is shown below.⁴³



“Italian family eating dinner. While most tables in the US abound with traditional turkey and other festive foods on Thanksgiving Day, this typical Italian family’s meal consists of the daily staple, spaghetti, with some cheese, bread and wine. Salvatore Nicoloso, a streetcar inspector and his family are shown eating dinner. November 23, 1948.” (Original caption.) Photographer unknown.

KILOGRAMS CONSUMED PER YEAR

	<i>Early 1950s</i>	<i>Early 1990s</i>
<i>Corn</i>	22	n/a
<i>Tomatoes</i>	20	58
<i>Vegetables</i>	73	102
<i>Fresh fruit</i>	44	120
<i>Citrus</i>	12	51
<i>Beef</i>	8	26
<i>Pork</i>	4	29
<i>Sugar</i>	15	27

One ounce = 28.35 grams; one pound = 453 grams, or slightly less than a half a kg.

This table shows changes in eating habits as well as the increase in food supply. Vegetable consumption increased by 40 percent, but meat consumption, extremely low in the early 1950s, increased several hundred times. Fresh fruit

and citrus consumption also increased several times while corn virtually disappeared from the cuisine. Polenta had been a food of the poor, and it lost its place in the cuisine like a bad memory.

Italy's postwar prosperity was a northern phenomenon. Agricultural historian Helstosky writes, "Living conditions in the south in the 1950s were not much better than in the days of the Jacini inquiry of 1877. The 1951 inquiry found that poor and some working-class Italians did not consume meat or wine, except on holidays. Some of the poorest families in Southern Italy devoted almost three quarters . . . of their income to food, a figure reminiscent of 19th century data on living standards."⁴⁴

Ann Cornelisen, an American aid worker who ran orphanages in the rural south from the mid-1950s until the 1970s, reinforces this view:

. . . Abruzzo and Lucania, bare and mountainous, with villages, some very large, perched precariously on high slopes or even cloudy little pinnacles, where, generations ago, it was decided they could best defend themselves from the invaders and malaria of the valleys below. The fields are no larger than two or three sheets spread out, a saddle here, a patch there. Machinery is of little use and would only turn up more rocks and clay. Long since the topsoil has been washed out to sea by torrential rains, and that man still persists says much for his secret powers of optimism and more for his determination to live.⁴⁵

The food was rough and scarce:

The procurement of the banal minimum to sustain human life required some ingenuity and a great deal of time. Butter could be purchased but long before it reached us had gone rancid in a warehouse in Bari. Salty *pecorino* cheese with an indefinable flavor of old drains and sour rags was available; *parmigiano* was not. Meat was for holiday and both tough and expensive. Fish arrived in a truck which had offered its wares to every village on its seventy-five mile route and reached us with the load reduced to a few scaly mid-sections of unknown origin and some very suspect clams which annually brought hepatitis, typhoid and most recently cholera. For an egg one made friends with a neighbor who kept chickens and then paid eight cents apiece [approximately one dollar in twenty-first-century prices]. The entire stock of a grocery store could be arranged in a room the size of a closet: tinned tomatoes, tomato paste, tuna fish, anchovies, canned peas, olives, artichokes and such in oil, *pecorino*, local *salame* with intimidating cubes of fat, pasta in an amazing number of shapes and sizes, though the larger it was, the better it was liked, and a bin of bread. . . . All prices were high, the quality inferior, but there was no choice.⁴⁶

Rudolph Bell's studies of four Italian villages, completed in the 1970s, confirm this portrait of scarcity.⁴⁷ The far-flung villages (three of four in the south, and the fourth a northern village in an isolated mountain region) differ in terms of

geographic resources, social systems, and cultures, but they produced cultures of poverty that were more similar than dissimilar. In the first of four villages lived mountain people who gathered wild foods, hunted game, and shared communal land in the mountainous far-eastern Emilia-Romagna. Bell's second site was a village in the vicinity of Naples populated by peasants in exploitative landlord relationships; the third was a village of landless renters living precariously on year-to-year labor arrangements in an isolated region of Calabria. Finally, there was a village of small holders eking out subsistence-level wheat crops in Sicily. What connects these places was poverty and cultures of desperation and, in three of the four settings, remnants of the *latifondi* system.

There was agricultural wealth in these villages, but not in the hands of those who created it. The village near Naples produced garlic, onions, citrus fruits, broccoli, cauliflower, figs, fennel, grain, mulberries, jujube, maize, parsnips, peppers, tomatoes, turnips, olives, wine, and squash. Sicily has produced wheat in abundance for more than a thousand years; the poverty in the villages Bell studied there had no environmental basis. Similarly, the land surrounding the village Bell studied in Calabria (also the south) supported a large stock of animals, yet in all cases the people who worked the land lived in poverty.

The result was what Bell referred to as *la miseria*: "being underemployed, having no suit or dress to wear for your child's wedding, suffering hunger most of the time, and welcoming death. [It is the worst in Calabria:] houses with cracked and crumbled walls, unborn children you know will be malnourished, abandoned lands, hostile lands, faces and hands burned by the sun. *La miseria* is a disease, a vapor arising from the earth, enveloping and destroying the soul of all that it touches. Its symptoms are wrinkles, distended bellies, anomic individualism, hatred of the soil, and the cursing of God."⁴⁸

Common recipes were *alla contadina*, *alla paesana*, *alla campagnola*, all of which translate as "of the peasantry." These dishes relied on local vegetables and, sometimes, a small amount of *pancetta* (unsmoked bacon for flavoring). Other recipes, *zuppa povera* (poor soup) and *pasta alla poverella* (pasta in the poor way), were simple dishes of local vegetables and beans.

Yet desperate poverty did not create a universally fatalistic peasant culture. Bell argues that it is not the absolute level of poverty and exploitation that determines the peasant's worldview but the means through which they are impoverished and exploited. The people of Castel San Giorgio and Rogliano suffered *la miseria* because they felt relatively deprived, but "peasants who lived mostly among their own kind and whose exploiters were remote, physically or through rigid class barriers, developed and maintained a flourishing and rich, derivative yet autonomous cultural life, one marked by doubled and inverted images, grotesque humor, sensuous gestures, and folk carnivals. . . . They laughed when they cursed the soil; they were proud of their tough hands; they

walked with straight shoulders and committed adultery with their eyes. Their rage and their hunger brought them together.”⁴⁹ Despite privation, exploitation, and near hopelessness (Bell reports high rates of infant death during months of the year when shortages and ignorance led to their undernourishment), Bell observes that peasants also knew “*la gioia*, moments of abundance, celebration, feasting, defiance of fate, love making, communal protest.”⁵⁰

Where the land was better, there was relative bounty in rural Italy. Elizabeth Romer, a British scholar who lived for many years in a worker’s house adjacent to a *fattoria* in the border region between Tuscany and Umbria, details the month-to-month life in the landowner family, growing and harvesting crops, harvesting wild foods, preparing crops for storage, cooking for up to thirty workers per day, and performing family rituals that carried them from year to year.⁵¹ It is hardly possible to imagine the near-feudal arrangements of their *fattoria* as late as the late 1970s. There were a few machines on the farm, although Silvana, the family’s matron, owned an electric range that she largely disdained, and most of the day-to-day food work was done as it had been for centuries. A pig was slaughtered by a traveling butcher, who brought additional meats to the farm to make special sausages. An eccentric shepherd had a ramshackle house next to the estate but spent most of his time with the 120 sheep he cared for year round. Each day Silvana made *pecorino* from the sheep’s milk, an important cash crop. Adjoining farmers gathered to thresh the wheat for bread flour and to partake in several-course feasts that Silvana and her female friends prepared.⁵² In the fall they gathered mushrooms that became, for a few weeks, a cherished staple; herbs and other plants were gathered year round for fresh salads and medicinal purposes. Both Silvana and her husband Orlando had grown up on isolated valleys where no doctors visited, and the knowledge of the natural world held by the old ones (*anziani*) was their only medicine. They drank their home-produced wine and flavored their beans and pasta with their homemade *prosciutto*. They ate several-course meals on a daily basis and fed up to twenty farmworkers a sumptuous lunch every workday. The book tells the story of hard but meaningful work and very good food—an appealing portrait indeed.

The *fattoria* was prosperous in part because it was in a tiny microclimate that favored the cultivation of tobacco, a lucrative cash crop. The owners sold food at the local market and bought only a few staples, such as dried cod or artichokes. Silvana and her occasional help spent most of their time cooking, producing an amazing variety of foods and meals. The rural abundance Romer describes was not typical, but it did exist where nature favored the farmer and where those who owned the land were also workers.

In recent decades, agricultural productivity has increased and population growth has been low. A modern social welfare system has lessened poverty, and

middle-class prosperity (and through television, its culture) has extended into the country's far reaches. What has this meant for the Italian cuisine? How have our subjects experienced the recent histories of Italian cuisines?

We asked the people we studied to tell us how the meaning of food changed during their lifetime. Isabella, in her fifties, is a sophisticated woman who has worked in several parts of the world, who grew up in the hard times of postwar Italy. Her reflections show how food was embedded in family life in the emerging urban renewal of postwar Italy.

"When I was young," Isabella remembers, "I was living, of course, with my family. The food was social in the sense that I was eating with my parents. Few people ate outside the home. It was after the war; there were not even many restaurants! My father was from a family of seven children, so I grew up with a lot of cousins, uncles, and aunts. And my father was building houses, so in a building with three floors, on each floor there was a family of brothers. So we were always moving up and down the floors. For the lunch, and especially for the festivities, we were together. So it was very social; I had a very social eating life because of this."

What foods does she remember?

"For my mother," Isabella remembers, "the first dish could be either soup or pasta, always—lunch and dinner. And then for the second there was not always beef; we were very careful in spending, but she could make do: tomatoes in the oven, or eggplant, whatever. There was the first and the second dish. Cheese was eaten as a second dish then."

For Cristina, the kitchen table now in her house symbolized the unity of her family. She tells us, "I was born in a large family, because my mother had five or six brothers. In the first years of my life (until I was eight or nine) I lived in a house in the country, of which I have a wonderful memory because of my grandmother and my grandfather. My grandfather was a railroader, a very handsome man, tall, with his white hair and the red stationmaster hat. And there was my grandmother, whom I loved very much. The house was very big, with an enormous kitchen that had a fireplace. And I have a beautiful memory of getting up in the morning and having my grandmother wash me in a basin as I leaned on a chair. And I also have the memory of being reunited, for dinner, around this table."

This world disappeared when Cristina's grandparents died. "We were much poorer before, but I remember my grandfather arriving with pastries on Sunday. When my grandfather died, I lost these things, because my father was not a generous man. We did not have economic problems; we were well off. But the Sunday lunch, the only one we could have done in a special way because there was no school or no work, was made in hurry, because my father had to go to the soccer game at two p.m. My father does not care about food; he never



"On a table set up in the street near their home, members of a large Italian family enjoy their dinner during the three day holiday of 'Ferragosto.' The ancient Romans started the holiday 2,000 years ago when they celebrated the birthday of Caesar Augustus. Almost all shops and places of business were closed for the occasion." (Original caption.) Photographer unknown.

invited me to a restaurant or to eat a pizza, understand? I would like to make the *tagliatelle* every day, because family and love gather inside these things.

Memories often centered on the food itself. For example, we asked whether Francesca and Agnese used flour made from chestnuts.

Francesca, "Yes, to make *castagnaccio* [cake] or *frittelle* [fried cake]."

Agnese adds, "I eat chestnuts just boiled."

"Did you eat cow's lung?" we ask.

Francesca, "Never!"

Agnese, "We gave the lungs to the cat!"

"Brains . . . kidneys, liver?"

"We used to eat them in the past," Francesca says. "Since the problem of 'mad cow disease' we stopped [using] these meats. We stopped using the kidney as well after the mad cow problem. Ten years ago I stopped cooking liver and kidney."

"When I was young I used to eat raw liver, with lemon, because I was ane-

mic,” Agnese recalls. And now, we ask? Agnese answers, “No!”

“What about beef tongue, tail, or foot?”

“Yes,” Francesca says, “in the boiled meat [*bollito misto*]. The tail and the foot of the veal, because they are more tender.”

“Heart?”

“I never ate the heart,” Francesca says. “Or maybe I tasted it one time but I didn’t like it because it was too tough.” For Agnese, “Never!”

“Tripe?”

“At one time I made it,” Francesca says, “but now I try and I don’t like it anymore.” Agnese, the conservative sister: “I never ate it!”

Francesca explains, “Nowadays the tripe is slippery. It no longer has the consistency it had.”

“The cheek?” (It resembles *pancetta*, common in Tuscan menus.)

But Francesca has little knowledge of it. “What is the cheek? Maybe *guanciale*. No, I’ve never made it.”

I ask if they ate blood.

“Oh, I ate blood when I was a little girl,” Francesca says, “but not real blood. I ate the *sanguinaccio* [blood pudding], still hot, as the farmers made the *sanguinaccio*.”

How was it made?

“Who knows?” Francesca says, “I was a little girl—I don’t remember! But I know it was very good.”

Dino, born in the 1950s, says that eating certain foods reminds him of when he was a child and takes him back to a special relationship to his mother. He tells us these memories are “a lot of things passing through your mind . . .” His parents’ generation came “from the war and the poverty,” and he remembers going to a butcher where his father bought steaks made from horsemeat. To their family the steaks indicated wealth. “If you give them to me today,” Dino says, “I will throw them at you!”

We turn to Costantino, a connoisseur, to help us understand how wine changed in the span of his lifetime. He tells us: “My parents are dead, so we have to consider that they, being born at the beginning of the last century, lived when wine was a completely different thing. My parents were born in the ‘trodden grape culture,’ and now when somebody offers me such a wine, I tell them I am a teetotaler. I think that it stinks and that strange things are inside. My parents drank this homemade wine, and they—they, everybody in the Po valley—grew up in the culture of the wine, considering it to be healthy. They drank wine during meals; it was part of their nourishment. People drank red and white wine, a little bit of sweet wine, and few sparkling wines, inferior in quality to the Italian champagne we have today. So I would say I grew up in a wine culture.

“And I still remember some wines—like the Tocai, from the hills around Garda Lake, that is now called San Martino della Battaglia. The Tocai disappeared for fifty years, and now I find it again in the Friuli region, and for me it is the best Italian white wine. So there is a history of how tastes change and what tastes are allowed to disappear. Today we very much like the Barolo, and maybe in thirty, forty years it will be seen as too heavy, too dry, too arid. The food culture changes as lifestyles change. Nowadays who drinks wine as food? Nowadays you drink wine because you like it! At one time the wine was one of the most important counterbalancing factors of the pellagra because the wine gave the necessary vitamins to fight it.”

Old Italians see the present in the context of the past, when food was less plentiful and thus more special. Holidays were special because an elaborate menu was served. The ironic tension between the contemporary cuisine of plenty and the more precious cuisine of scarcity is discussed in Counihan’s study, for her subjects were elderly when they were interviewed in the early 1980s, and they experienced the shortages of fascism and war and the wealth of the postwar era. Counihan’s peasants remembered scarce food that they desired and appreciated, and they say that now “one eats as though it is a holiday” on a daily basis. With the excess, however, there is a loss of desire. This is captured in the old idiom *poco ma buono* (only a little, but good) transformed to *molto, ma buono?* (a lot, but is it good?).⁵³

Baldo, born in 1930, explains: “Maybe we appreciated food more in the old days than now, because today we have no desire for anything. We reach the holidays, and yes, we have our traditional foods, but we eat these same foods so many times during the year. How many times do we eat these things—chicken, special desserts . . . who even dreamed of these things in the old days?” Baldo likens it to the easy availability of sex among the young: they have it all the time (so he thinks) but it doesn’t mean anything: “Today desires are nothing like they were before. What kind of desires do they have today?”⁵⁴

Renzo, also elderly, agrees: “Today we eat much better, with more variety. However, in the old days the food was more desired—Sunday, because we ate better; holidays, because we ate capon. In contrast, today every day is Sunday. Then we longed for things. Today, instead, pretty much every day we have everything we want, but the taste of food is worse. Today the food has no more taste. Today, if you eat, let’s say spinach, or Swiss chard, or beet greens—everything tastes the same. But in the old days, if you ate spinach, it had a distinct flavor. If you ate meat—pork, let’s say—it had its own flavor. It was completely different from other meat. In the old days, we always raised two pigs—they ate the overripe fruit, all the kitchen scraps, all that good stuff. They fattened up

on those things. They had a different taste. You know how meat is produced today, right? In feedlots.”⁵⁵

We asked Agnese and Francesca, both born in the 1920s, if they see the food in the same way.

“Yes, certainly!” Agnese says. “We agree!”

“Yes!” Francesca adds, “Also the meat—people ate meat once a week when things were difficult, and not always once a week! Also the broth—when people ate the broth it was like a feast day.”

We ask, when the food was scarce was there more taste *for* the food?

“I have this feeling that the food is now less good,” Agnese says, “but I also think that this is because of my age. The taste is different.”

Francesca wonders if the change might be due to home-based rather than industrial processes. She reminds us that “I always made everything at home. I made pasta, cakes . . .”

Did the chicken have a different taste? “Oh yes,” Francesca agrees, “it is true, it is true. The chicken, yes. At one time you cooked the chicken *alla cacciatora* and it was exquisite. And now it is disgusting.”

Poverty and plenty alternated through Italy’s history, but it produced both wretched suffering and creative cooking. Some of Italy’s land systems (the *mezzadria* in particular) were much kinder than others. The older people we studied all experienced some form of poverty and base their modern sense of food on those memories. And for some the tastes and experiences of the old foods exceeded what has become for some a less tasty and valued world of plenty.

SACRED-PROFANE

Eating has been ritualized as part of Catholicism for more than a thousand years and increasingly has become a secular ritual in increasingly secular Italian culture.

Christianity became the official religion of Italy in the third century and oversaw the decline of Rome and the subsequent development of Europe. Catholicism is a highly ritualized religion; activities are repeated on a daily, weekly, and yearly schedule, using objects, often food, that have symbolic meaning. Even singular events in a person’s life—birth, marriage, and death—are ritualized in this manner.

The ritual cycle in the prototypical Catholic community, the monastery, was embodied in specified hours of prayer each day of the week. For lay populations, Catholicism structured the week, the year, and the lifetime. Weekly schedules included penitential days, Wednesday and Friday; yearly schedules defined long



Preparations in Piazza Maggiore, Bologna, on Holy Saturday, the night before Easter Sunday. The arrangements included a twenty-foot-high screen onto which an image of the pope was projected live, delivering his Easter sermon.

periods, such as Lent, as penitential. Feast days followed penitence, including Sundays, Easter, and Christmas, and saints' days throughout the year.

Foods symbolize sacred objects. In the Eucharist (Communion) bread and wine are transformed to the flesh and blood of Christ with the repetition of Jesus' words to the disciples at the Last Supper. Other rituals use edible substances that are not eaten: Last Rites (extreme unction) involves the application of holy oil to parts of the body, and baptism and other rituals involve holy water, sprinkled but not consumed.

The only food defined symbolically is the Easter lamb, a reference to Jesus as the sacrificial lamb. But the liturgical calendar recalls the lives of saints all days of the year (calendars in different parts of the world commemorate different saints), and in many regions, feasts featuring regional foods celebrate these saints' days. For example, in Venice *filetti di San Pietro in salsa d'arancia* (fish in orange sauce) commemorates St. Peter, and *risi e bisi* (rice with peas), is eaten on the day of St. Mark, the patron saint of Venice.⁵⁶ In Pittsburgh (Harper's hometown), on March 19 St. Joseph is celebrated by an Italian congregation with a "St. Joseph's table" laden with breads of various shapes and sizes. Children dressed as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus sit at a table that faces the symbolic foods.

Pellegrino Artusi specified dishes for national holidays including Epiphany (January 6), Berlingaccio (a disappeared festival), Pranzo di Quaresima (forty days before Easter, fish only), two celebrations of Easter (Pasqua d'uovo and Pasqua di rose, Easter Sunday and Monday), Festa della statuto (an obsolete celebration of the declaration of independence), Quindici agosto (August fifteen, a festival for the Virgin Mary), and Festa di Natale (Christmas). In addition, there were many local festivals connected to patron saints, local myths, and esoteric religious celebrations. In some instances Catholicism blended with agricultural or fishing rituals: celebrations of plantings or harvests, or blessings of the fleet.

Food was also symbolic in the profane world. This is shown in the portrait by Bell of a wedding feast among peasants of southern Italy. Here foods symbolize sexual potency:

Father and son shared the same plate, eating in communion the finely mixed essence of life and death and joining their separate procreative roles as one. "May you be as fruitful as your father" was the curiously inverted blessing with which the tripe was consumed and cleansed with wine. The meal continued with cheese, a food universally thought to increase male virility. It was the young man's mother who had made the cheese and, although she was now old and her breasts barren, it was to her nourishment that her son returned. All men at the table were offered cheese, thus recalling the boundless fertility of the groom's mother, but only he partook of her nourishment on that day. At the wedding feast itself the choice of foods became more explicit. Reserved for the groom alone and served with a sauce prepared by his mother-on-law with rare and unusual herbs were mountain oysters.⁵⁷

These worlds are largely a memory. Aside from pockets in the south, modern Italy is no longer poor, regionally isolated, nor religious. However, Italians continue to eat with reference to religious as well as secular rituals.

We begin our study with Christmas.

Pino, born in Bologna, describes the feasts prepared by his southern-born parents. This is the food he grew up with, and it is what his family eats when they return to the south: "In southern Italy they celebrate Christmas on December twenty-fourth for dinner. On this day they eat only fish; meat is prohibited. They eat many dishes of fish before the midnight mass. In my grandparents' house, typical of Bari, we ate many fish antipasti, including fried mussels, shrimp, octopus, and salad.

"The second plate was pasta with fish, typically pasta with smoked salmon in our family. For others, pasta was served with fresh fish and tomato, spaghetti with mussels, or risotto with fish, and *baccalá*. The second plate consisted of as-

sorted fried fish, some cooked with tomato. This was ideally a whole, fresh fish. Then there was salad and a cake like *panettone*, but there are different kinds of cakes typical of the region. Fruit follows the cake, including orange, mandarins, and grapes, which were expensive, being out of season. There were nuts, always, always, always, called *frutta secca*, and dried figs. On the twenty-fifth there is *pasta al forno*, roasted and stuffed capon, and fried artichoke.” Pino tells me, “For my father it is not Christmas unless there is *baccalá* fried, but that is the only day of the year that there is *baccalá* fried, eaten as a leftover.”

This is a “lean” day before the feast of Christmas—a penitential day designed for humble fare to encourage religious reflection. Centuries of Catholic tradition defined fish as a lean food, although it is now more expensive than most meats.

The southern Christmas Eve feast has no parallel in Bologna. Pino explains, “The menu of the north consists of lunch on December 25. It is a rigid menu: antipasti (there could be several types); tortellini with broth; three dishes of meat, a mixture of boiled meat including steak, beef tongue, chicken, and *cotechino*—a meat like salami, fresh, which must be cooked. It is similar to *zampone*, which you have eaten. The steak, tongue, chicken are used to prepare the broth. The meat is served with green sauce (made from parsley, tomato, chopped boiled eggs, oil, and capers), mashed potatoes, and lentils. You must eat lentils also on the first day of the year; in these two occasions lentils symbolize good luck for the year. Then you eat roasted meat, usually capon, stuffed with other meats, and bread, like the stuffing of tortellini. The dessert is *panettone* and *torrone* (white candy made from honey, almonds, and egg whites) served with sparkling wine, and, finally, fresh fruit, usually mandarin oranges, and dried fruit such as dates.”

This was the typical Christmas feast prepared by most of Bolognese we spoke to. There were small variations on this theme, but the essentials were similar.

For Elena and her husband, who divide their time between their home in Bologna and a summer house in Rimini, the Christmas feast is different. For Christmas, Elena says, they eat “*cappelletti* or tortellini in broth, then maybe also with *ragù*.”

“Tortellini with *ragù*?” I ask. (all other Bolognese I had spoken to insisted such a combination was impossible).

“Yes. Broth and *ragù*: two. It is typical to have tortellini with *ragù* in Romagna, yes. You cook them in the broth, then you separate some and serve them with *ragù*. You make two different dishes, one with broth and the other with *ragù*. In Bologna they mix tortellini with cream. In Romagna, in Rimini, we always eat it that way. Then we eat *bollito* (the boiled meat) with hot sauce. I will show it to you; it is the hot mustard, made of candied fruit, very strong. The meat is tongue, chicken—very very good. I take the meat soaked in the



Pannettone (Christmas cake), normally served with Prosecco.

broth to the table, so it stays hot. The restaurants that serve the mixed boiled meat keep it in the broth, and beneath it is a little fire which keeps it hot, because the boiled meat has to be eaten hot. There is a bit of fat, sometimes the marrow. And then, for supper, we eat a little. . . . We stay sitting at the table from one p.m. to four p.m. Three hours, because we chat, we laugh.”

Laura, her daughter, adds, “We fight!”

Elena agrees, “We fight . . . Well, that also is part of life. And for supper we eat only a little.”

Capon is a typical Christmas food, and it is bred to be slaughtered just as a holiday occurs. Costantino explains, “You don’t buy the capon in June, because it is a meat to be eaten at Christmas, according to our tradition. I mean we would never prepare the Easter dinner like the Christmas dinner; we would never eat on August 15 what we would eat on a January Sunday, never!”

Some foods, like the Christmas cake *panettone*, became important for reasons unconnected to ritual or seasons. Patrizia noted that “Christmas cannot exist without *panettone*. It is a post-World War II ritual based on a cake invented about 1450 in Milan by a duke, Ludovico Sforza. It is a cake made by mistake with too much yeast. Now there is agreement across Italy: Christmas cannot exist without this cake, which is spongy—it has some fruit, in fact it tastes like an ultralight fruitcake. It is most certainly a created taste.”

So there is a pan-Italian template for this important holiday: there will be a feast, and it will incorporate elements of regional cuisine fancied up and prepared in abundance.

Italians experience Christmas in many ways. Barbara and Carlo create an intimate ceremony on Christmas Eve, with candles and holly. They cook fish for Christmas Eve though they are not religious and the kind of fish does not matter. In Barbara's words, "We are not tied to tradition."

I asked the other Patrizia (*due*) if her family ate at their kitchen table during their holiday celebrations or if they set a table in the living room, as they did when they invited me. She answered: "We are so-called insipid people [laughing]; we do not make any family celebration: I hate all the feasts, I hate to go to eat in a restaurant; I go only if there is a particular occasion. For example, last night we went out and there was a nice atmosphere. But the celebrations—I am a depressed person [laughing], so I do not do feasts. Fortunately we now include Maria, Daniele's girlfriend, who has much revived the environment. Usually because of family tragedies and the world tragedies there is nothing to celebrate."

"Even at Christmastime?" I ask.

"Yes," Patrizia says, "for at Christmas there is the [ill] grandmother, so the atmosphere is even more depressing!"

Giorgio and Bassano, Dani and Mari, were less connected to their families than were other couples we studied. One member of each couple came from other parts of Italy, and their Christmas rituals were highly improvised.

Giorgio and Bassano spend time with Giorgio's mother, who lives downstairs from their apartment, so Patrizia asked if they had Christmas dinner with her. But no, that was not their habit. They had previously had Christmas in Milan, where Bassano is from, but family politics became complicated, "So," Giorgio tells us, "we began to spend Santo Stefano day [the day after Christmas, a holiday in Italy] here with all Bassano's relatives. After doing this for two years, we came to think that relatives are like fish that stink after three days."

"Mainly because they broke an entire set of glasses!" Giorgio says.

"So we began to celebrate Santo Stefano day with our friends," Bassano says, "and we have done that for many years."

Marina explained that her family does not have any traditions; there is no festive meal, and the surrounding festivities "look like they do not exist." And for Dani, family rituals had once been traditional dinners at home, with relatives, but little by little the relatives died and now only four of them remain. So to replace the family dinner at home, for the past four or five years "we have this 'wonderful' dinner, at the restaurant, that we always hope will last as briefly as possible."

Cristina, who often invites friends to her informal parties, finds the traditional Christmas feast alienating because it is shared with relatives for whom she feels little warmth. She journeys to her mother's house, but it is "not the Christmas I would like to have." Still the ritual or the homemade tortellini remains, the preparation overseen by her aged and ailing mother, two aunts, and her mother-in-law.

Christmas is probably the most important event in the yearly calendar of most Italians. For some there is a lockstep ritual of carefully produced dishes that follow a rigid menu. But not all, or even most, of our subjects experienced Christmas that way. For some Christmas is a recurring disappointment; for others it is a special time aside from food, and for others it is a holiday with special foods that have lost their symbolic meaning.

SUNDAYS

One thing is certain: the Sunday meal in Italy is for family. It is unusual to invite guests for dinner on a Sunday, and I had few research dinners on that day of the week. Exceptions were invitations to Libera and Vito's and to Francesca's, where I was treated almost like family.

As I think of Sunday dinners at the home of Libera and Vito, I think of feasts. The dinners were sufficient cause for celebration (perhaps because of my visits) to have sparkling wine, Prosecco or champagne, with our appetizers. Libera seemed to outdo herself with each successive dinner, so a long walk on Sunday afternoons became a ritual as well. As I sat down to these afternoon dinners I felt the collective weight of Italians across and down the boot doing the same thing; the same events meant roughly the same things to those lucky enough to participate.

Maria also provides an example of Sundays done right. She lives with her husband and sons in Bologna, but they have extended family in their hometown Mantova, fifty kilometers north of Bologna, where they often spend their weekends. "On Sundays," she tells us, "there is something more. For example the appetizer. On Sunday we invite the grandparents, the cousins, or the aunt, and I try to prepare something different, usually the appetizer or a particular dessert. Because at our house unfortunately (I'm saying 'unfortunately' because Costantino is slightly overweight) every night there is the dessert, because Costantino wants it."

Maria does not like desserts and claims that except for *torta mantovana*, a pie made with pine nuts and almonds from her region, she cannot make them well. But otherwise a full menu is prepared, and Sunday is dedicated to the relatives. When they are just the four, the meal is still distinctive. The family eats in the dining room, where "it is more beautiful—there is the sun." The dinner

SUNDAY DINNER WITH LIBERA AND VITO



The view from Vito and Libera's balcony: postwar housing in a Bologna suburb. What I find remarkable in these dwellings is their sturdiness (you cannot hear your neighbor), the quality of materials (marble floors are common), the length of time people inhabit them (often for several generations), and the habit of shutting out the light to preserve coolness. This was not a hot day, but most of the windows visible from Vito's balcony are at least half shuttered.



Vito serves the main course of roast pork; the *contorni* are asparagus and baked-stuffed mushrooms. In the final photo above, Vito brings the dessert wine to the table.



is special; it must include the *antipasti*, if only “eating a slice of salami.”

“Because on Sunday the appetizer is required?” Patrizia asks.

“Yes, it’s needed,” Maria answers. “At normal dinners if you eat the appetizer, you skip pasta, to avoid a meal that is too rich, but on Sunday lunch the appetizer is needed, even just an omelet dressed with a drop of balsamic vinegar.”

The specialness of the meal is eroded by the fact that most Italians now eat well throughout the week; it becomes an effort to define Sunday as different. We ask Lucia, “When you are at home on the weekend, is Sunday different than the other days?”

She answers, “Anna, particularly, scolded me, saying that by now you can’t tell when it is Sunday and when it is a weekday, because I don’t make any effort to do something extra on Sundays.”

Franco adds, “The fact is that we can’t improve Sunday, so we should lessen the quality of the weekdays, because the standard is already high.”

“On Sunday,” Lucia says, “I make an effort to do—not great things—to make some *tagliatelle* by hand and make the *ragù* with some mushrooms, for now the family is frightened of this mad cow disease. On Sunday I prepare something more, or some *pasta al forno*, or some tortelloni.” They may have some ice cream, “mostly for the kids.” But if there are guests she prepares a cake, or at least a pie. There is an orange cake they prefer, and the *certosino* (an Italian cake named after a Carthusian monk) is made by hand. “Otherwise,” she says, “no!”

Making special foods and eating them together as a family is the cultural ideal. But it is not universal. For some, Sunday is a time to spend with one’s partner or spouse and to eat informally. Extended family may not be invited, as was the case for Barbara and Carlo. She tells us Sunday is more quiet; they eat lunch together, always at home. Sunday lunch is “the time when you eat something special, for example a particular pasta, or a particular sauce.” The lunch is special, but for dinner there are just leftovers. We ask, “And what about parents and relatives—do you invite them on Sunday?”

Barbara answers, laughing. “Never!”

Bassano and Giorgio and Daniela and Marina were also informal about Sunday; it had become a day of relaxation. Bassano, the pragmatist of the kitchen, said that for him there was no difference between weekdays and holidays. But for Giorgio, Sunday is a moment to practice his culinary skills. So when we asked, “Do you have a special lunch on Sunday?” Bassano answered “No!” To which Giorgio added, “Let’s say that on Sunday he stays on the sofa and I cook!”

They might go downstairs to Giorgio’s mother’s flat “when we feel like eat-

ing,” or, Giorgio added, “when we feel like being in a group.”

Daniela said for them there is not a big difference between the meals of Sunday and the rest of the week; maybe on Sundays they eat less, because they get up later and have breakfast at midday. Marina added that perhaps Sunday is the only time they find the excuse for lunch, but even then they eat light food, because often they have dinner outside on Saturday night, or at home with friends, and they eat more than usual. “So,” she tells us, “it is easy for us to decide to share a big salad.”

Finally, Mara takes a break on Sundays; she cooks all week and even returns home to prepare lunch for her husband and son. So on Sunday she wants others to cook for her. It is a ritual; she has to rest.

The range of Sunday dinners is extreme. Some families enforce a strict ritual, and to be in the family is to participate in these dinners. Some couples split up for Sunday dinner: the son goes to his mother’s and the daughter to her mother’s. Others use Sundays to escape the week’s frantic pace and to eat in an informal way. For others, Sundays (and other holidays) are but a reminder of the failure of their families to achieve the closeness Italian families are supposed to embody. Some families are far from their relatives and pleased not to be forced into rituals they would not enjoy. These variations, however, do not deny the ongoing connection, for most Italians, between ritual and food, which reach into deep historical memory.

SUMMARY

We have considered the tensions between the national and regional, between poverty and scarcity, and between the sacred and profane. Much can be explained by the generalization that while Italy was until very recently regional, poor, and religious, it is now nationally oriented, affluent, and profane. Still, both sides of these oppositions persist, and Italy remains a culture of unresolved and very interesting contradictions.

The table is set; we proceed to the meal.



Piazza Maggiore, Bologna

PART ONE



"If you want to know what the table is for me, it is an enormous wish for love. Cooking gives me hope to receive love from the people to whom I give food. I mean, even if I give you an onion omelet, I hope to tell you, through this omelet, that I love you, Patrizia, and I hope you are fine at my house, so that you feel love and you give some love to me too . . ."

Love

THE CHAPTERS TITLED “LOVE,” “POWER,” AND “LABOR” EXAMINE HOW Italian women create and are created by their family foodworlds. Our discussion of *love* describes how Italians use food as currency in their intimate friendships and relationships; regarding *power* we show how women’s social identities are in part derived from their command of the kitchen. Our discussion of *labor* sees food preparation as one part of domestic labor, monopolized by women even as they have entered the labor force and as Italian families have changed in size, composition, and ideology.

MANGIA, MANGIA—I LOVE YOU!

In Italy, *food is a means through which to express affection*. Patrizia says simply: “In our culture if you want to express love, if you want to thank someone, food is the way to show these sentiments. I open my house; I share my food with you. It is more than a gift.”

But love is not simple, with or without food. In the following we explain how Italian cooking communicates messages of love and friendship. We examine how food evokes memories of family, how it enables the mother to be fully Italian, and how eating holds families and couples together. We also look at how food affects arguments in couples and, finally, how social life outside the family is created around and through food.

TELLING ABOUT LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

Cooking is more than combining ingredients; it becomes meaningful through the sentiment it expresses. Maria expressed it this way: “If a person puts love into making a dish and offers it to you in a certain manner, there is warmth inside. Those who throw a dish together without care have a detached, superior



Piergiorgio and Dino

attitude. I can't explain it very well. It's a matter of more or less love, not for people but for food."

Patrizia asks, "Maybe you see an act of love in the food preparation and the offer of the food, rather than in the food itself?" and Maria says, "Yes, there is a certain passion, for me."

Cristina expresses it very simply: "I want to have a big house, with an enormous table, with a lot of people and a lot of pasta. For me the pasta is the love. Not the meat, just the pasta and the bread. I don't know why."

Do you necessarily enter into affectionate or even loving relationships when you accept food prepared by Italians? Well, perhaps! When I return to Italy my friends immediately want to feed me. I like the food—it is tasty because it is made well from good raw materials, but there is something more as well. The food is a way to say "Hello, welcome back; we're glad to see you again!" It is an expression of friendship, in a country where friendship and love count for much.

And while the book is not about restaurant food, many visitors to Italy sense this quality even when the food is prepared for sale. It is not everywhere; I have had cynically prepared food (ill-prepared, made from inferior ingredients, carried to the table with indifference, and priced exorbitantly) in *trattorie* in the center of Rome. But one block from the buzz of Termini, the Osteria da Luciano evokes scenes from a film made decades ago: friendly formality, engaged and interested waiters, and food that compares favorably to what I was served in



Stefya and Piergiorgio

the Italian homes I've visited. In fact, Luciano's has been the rule rather than the exception.

THE TASTE AND SMELL OF MEMORY

Memories created by the smells and tastes of food are not rational recollections of places or events but connections to things past.¹ For the Italians we spoke to, the importance of memories was not in the recalled food but in recollections of people who made the food and of the circumstances shared with them. The old people now living were then young; the elderly of that day are now gone. And those who remember return to when they were young and innocent, full of life's wonder.

Stefya remembers her deceased grandmother, from Lombardy, when she cooks. She follows her recipes exactly as they are written, and "they arouse memories of when we prepared them together and when we discussed them,

talking and eating. So I make them identically, as she handed them down to me.”

Patrizia said that it sounded like a rite, and Stefy agreed: “Yes, that is true regarding my grandmother’s recipes. I can modify the recipes that do not have any affective value, such as the ones I read in magazines, but not my grandmother’s.”

For Cristina, the memory of food takes her to her beloved grandparents and the generous sociability that she re-creates in her life, around the same table she sat at then. (It is interesting that in Italian *tavola* means not only the physical table but also what happens around the table.) Patrizia sat at Cristina’s table discussing the party she had invited us to the week before, and Cristina said, “Every night when I was a child there were fourteen of us around my grandfather’s table. He sat at the head of the table, and my cousin and I sat at his sides. I was four or five and my cousin was three, and this was my grandparents’ table, where we now sit. When I married, I claimed this table. For me, the table represents a lot of things: my childhood and my great love for my grandfather and my grandmother. Unfortunately, I had two absent parents, because they had to work. The people who were present were my grandparents, who took care of me until I was eight.

“I like to cook very much, and I like the idea of cooking what there is at home. So in my house there are always some onions, potatoes, pasta . . . If I come home and there are ten of us? One kilo of pasta! I like to live life spontaneously. Yes, I also like to prepare a special dish, but I am more bound to the idea of having all the things I need at home to prepare a dinner at the last minute. Because I remember my grandmother improvising—I remember the potatoes peeled at the last minute when people came to the house in the evening. So my grandmother would say: ‘Well, you stay here to have dinner with us!’ And we added a place at the table and shifted the chairs. It is a very beautiful memory.”

“How many times a week do you have dinners like this?” Patrizia asks.

“Well, Patti, if it were possible, I would do it every night! Anyway, I do it at least one or two times a week.”

“And are dinners organized that day?”

“Yes, quite on the spot!”

Patrizia shows Cristina the photos. “Typical, always a mess, informal,” she says.

“How did this party come about?” Patrizia asks.

“At the last moment, as usual. Because of my life, everything is always at the last minute. So much so that there was the skillet on the table, as you can see. Usually I try not to have the skillet on the table! That night was really organized at the last minute, so it was very informal, and there was what there was. I do love the properly set-up table, with nice glasses, etc., but this one

DINNER AT CRISTINA'S



Mortadella, pasta, filets, vegetables . . .
ice cream from an artisan shop . . . coffee
and talk. The photo that opens this chapter
was also from this party.



was organized at the last minute. Anyway I like the improvisation, because it is a nice, familiar feeling. I like it when a friend comes to our house at the last minute, telling me he is hungry. So I make what there is at home. I take some eggs; I take the skillet; I take the pasta. There is always food in my house. I can improvise a dish of pasta with sauce or things like that. So I like to think that my friends can call me at the last minute: 'Cristina, I'm coming and I am hungry.' There is a piece of bread, understand?"

Patrizia says, "There is more than a piece of bread!"

In fact the party at Cristina's was quite informal, warm, and entertaining. It began with an unannounced invitation. Could I take photos? Yes. Would the other guests mind? No, of course not! Other guests included two families with children and young colleagues of Cristina's. The food was typical—that is, varied *antipasti* and a simple pasta. Friends crowded into the kitchen while the food was prepared; people reached across the table to serve themselves or pour more wine. No one paid special attention to me, as I practiced Italian and photographed. Eventually guests watched a strange video about homeless dogs in Romania, and then there was an hour or two of quiet conversation. On the way home Patrizia said only, "Typical!"

All cultures connect memory to taste and smell, but in Italy there are factors that make these connections unusually strong. Eating takes place in family settings, and families are strong in Italy. Sentimentalism in Italy is expressed in opera, a pronounced sense of the romantic, and idealizations of the mother figure. But taste and smell are connected to memory in Italy because of the things Italians cook and eat: Bolognese *ragù* is a simple dish, but it is cooked slowly, continually stirred for hours, filling the house with aromas. Polenta is just cornmeal, but you cook it for hours, again filling the room with aromas. A finger is inserted in the sauce; the grandmother tastes and offers a sample to the child. Even the daily pasta, not particularly aromatic, fills the room with an inviting moisture, the sound of boiling water, and faint smells of wheat glutens. The kitchen becomes a place where the grandmother entertains the granddaughters, teaching them esoteric arts of the kitchen. It leads to what Jon Holtzman called "prospective memory":³ Cristina looks forward to an experience because it reminds her of the past; the smells and experiences she creates transport her to a version of those events. But the cast of characters has changed, and experiencing the food she previously ate with the others makes their loss more poignant. This is what Roland Barthes referred to when he wrote of how photographs seem to fly you back in time and in the meantime remind you in exquisite clarity of what is gone. Here it is, and now you remember it absolutely, but you cannot have it

again.⁸ So the beauty of memory is also the basis of the tragedy that surrounds it, whether encouraged by images or by smells.

MOTHERLY LOVE

Silvia was about to travel to Ravenna to see her mother. What would she cook for Silvia? Hopefully *melanzane alla parmigiana*: “She makes the best ever in the world. Whenever I would tell my friends, ‘Valentina made *melanzane alla parmigiana*’ [they’d clamor,] ‘Can I come?’ ‘Can I come?’ We always had, like, ten people for dinner. My mother never had any problem with that; she would say ‘Sure!’”

“How does she make them?” I ask. “Does she soak the eggplant in salt first?”

“No, you fry the eggplant and layer them with a lot of paper, so that they are not soaking in oil . . . and then you make layers with tomato sauce, eggplant, and two different types of cheese.”

This seems to be a very easy recipe; I ask, why is it special? “She’s changed the type of cheese,” Silvia says, “One is *parmigiano*. I’m not sure what other cheese she’s using now. And she makes the tomato sauce, so it’s not the kind you buy.”

“What’s in the tomato sauce?” I ask.

“Nothing!” she answers, and I am a bit startled. “Nothing? No garlic?”

“No garlic,” Silvia says, “just some salt. She buys the fresh tomatoes and makes it.”

“Onion?”

“Nothing!”

Patrizia adds, “My mother does it the same way. Just the tomatoes and salt.”

Silvia continues: “You cook them with a very, very low, low flame for a long, long time. Just tomatoes and salt. A low flame for a very long time . . .”

With these directions any one of us could make a close approximation of Silvia’s mother’s eggplant parmesan. In her hands, however, it becomes “a true act of love.” Silvia says that her mother “wants to please me because we don’t get to see each other all that often. And she knows that there are dishes that she does very well. That make me very happy, and I enjoy that a lot.”

I ask again, “Why is this special?” and Silvia has no real answer: “I don’t know, I’ve tried to make it the same way she does, and it never comes out the same way. There’s something she does; I don’t know why, but they’re just wonderful. They’re famous. When I was a kid and I would tell my friend that she had eggplants, we had always guests, friends, coming over to share. And she would always be happy to have more people: ‘Sure, bring them over, no problem.’ She was always very open about that.”

SUNDAY DINNER WITH AGNESE AND FRANCESCA



It is three blocks through the covered sidewalks of Bologna from Patrizia's flat to the home of her mother. They see each other several times a week.



Sunday dinners at Francesca's draw on about twenty recipes from Emilia-Romagna, including fresh pasta made with cocoa powder, eggs, and flour; artisan-made stuffed pastas from the store around the corner; and many cuts of pork and beef. Marscapone is Agnese's specialty, which she brings with her as she rides the bus from the other side of the city. We eat very well but don't spend the whole day, and the next week we return for another reenactment of a family ritual.



Silvia continues, “It makes her immensely happy to see I’m happy! That’s why I say it’s a true act of love—the preparation, the time she takes to make everything, and the fact that she knows exactly what I like the best. I think that’s what makes it so good—why her eggplant recipe in the end always tastes better than anybody else’s. Because there’s her affection involved.”

Pino, who had overheard the conversation, explained, “As I told you before, there is a particular relationship in Italy between family and food. I told you that it’s usual for mothers to give food to sons or daughters to take home when they visit, when a son or daughter lives outside the parents’ house. And it is not because they are worried that the son or daughter doesn’t have anything in the refrigerator to eat. It’s just a way to reinforce the link. It is not dependency; absolutely it is not a question of dependency. It’s a question of, I think, renewal.”

“Renewal?” I ask.

Pino answers, “Exactly. And a link. The mother is the person that gave you her milk—”

Patrizia: “—food . . . nourishment—”

“When you were a child,” Pino says, “the mother fed you, and the mother wants to continue this because it’s a part of her maternity. It’s very easy to see in both the north and south of Italy. There is no difference. Absolutely. This habit is observed everywhere in Italy. For example, it is incredible that you can observe on Sunday sons and daughters, with wives and husbands, going to their parents’ house for lunch. The same people, coming home, carry packages. These packages are not for leftovers but for freshly made food. Because mothers say: ‘I prepared this cake for you.’ ‘Oh come on Ma, I’m on a diet.’ ‘No, please, this is a cake; it is very good for you. You have to eat it. I made with my hands this day.’

“‘I made it with my hands,’” Pino repeats. “For example, let me talk to you about the eggplants my mother prepared.”

“Which I ate all of tonight,” I say.

“Exactly,” Pino says. “*Those* eggplants. For a while my mother gave me eggplants, and she prepared them with a lot of garlic. And I don’t like a lot of garlic. So I told that to my mother:

“‘Mom, please. Don’t prepare *melanzane* with garlic.’

“‘What do you want me to do?’

“‘I don’t know, Mom, prepare *melanzane* easy, simple. Just cook it. No dressing, no dressing, please, because you put in too much garlic.’ Then for some time she made us plain *melanzane*, just cooked. But my mother, after a while, began to tell me: ‘Oh, come on—just *melanzane* cooked—not a little bit of oil?’



Pino and Fili

“‘Sure, Ma, just as long as you don’t put in too much garlic.’

“Now she’s happy because she doesn’t give me just cooked eggplant; she gives me *her melanzane*, made with her recipe. She uses less garlic because she knows that we don’t particularly like a lot of garlic. Before she would add a lot of mashed garlic; now she puts a whole head of garlic *on the melanzana* so we can remove it. But the idea is not to give me food to eat at home; it is to give me something that she made.”

Patrizia adds, “A piece of her.”

Pino agrees, “Yes, a piece of her.”

I tell them I understand with regard to their mothers, but I still don’t understand why the housecleaner also leaves food.

Pino explains that it is because “she feels like she is a member of the family. Absolutely. Because I can give a friend of mine a piece of cake, just seeing him. ‘This is my cake, I do it for you.’”

“Does this last for your whole life?” I ask, speaking of the mother’s food gifts. “When does it stop?”

Pino, “Never.”

“Never?”

“Never. Only when she dies.”

Often when I stay with Patrizia, we eat food her mother Francesca or Aunt Agnese has prepared. Patrizia says, “I have no shame!”

I add, “Sure, it’s pretty easy: ‘Mother, I need a torta. I need a plate of lasagna. I need some *melanzane*!’”

Pino says, “Yes, absolutely. And my mother is very happy to do it, too. She’ll say: ‘Oh, sure, you want _____ also?’”

“What about when the mother dies?” I ask.

Pino pauses. “Oh, maybe . . . I will be very slim—we’ll be fat no longer!”

“So when the food no longer exists, what is that like?” I push a bit harder.

Pino says, “Well, maybe, in the case we have a son, we’ll continue the tradition with the food. But we have no son; yeah, I understand what you say, okay.”

“In my case,” I say, “my relationship with my mother has nothing to do with food or these things you describe.”

Pino pauses again. “Okay, I have a good example to answer your question. My grandfather is dead, and my grandmother stopped cooking because she now is very old, but it really is because my grandfather is dead. So you know what has happened regarding the food? I stopped eating some kinds of food because that food was made just by my grandmother.”

“For example?”

“The name is very difficult . . . a sweet made by my grandmother typical of Bari, a town in the south. And, for example, once my grandfather started to feel sick, my grandmother stopped cooking this sweet, and I never ate it again.”

“Did you stop eating it because you can’t find it here or because it reminds you too much of your grandmother?”

“Oh, I can find the same sweet here,” Pino says, “but in any case, for me, it was linked to my grandmother, so for me it doesn’t make sense to go into bakeries to buy this sweet. It’s a typical memory of my childhood. Other kinds of recipes for sweets have been transmitted to my mother, for example *castagnelle*. *Castagnelle* is a cookie coming from my grandfather and grandmother’s family, but my mother learned to bake it, and now it is my family food.”

Memory operates in several ways—it might be embodied in recipes or experienced in tastes and smells that are connected to departed people. The connection may be so strong that when the person is gone, the tastes and smells their food evoked must also cease.⁴

We ask for the mother’s perspective on family dining. Maria described it as having “an important meaning: a moment of union, of relationships, and mostly of extreme conviviality. It’s the real socialization of the family, it’s mom, dad, and sons.”

The family has a very busy life, and their engagements often keep them apart during the day. “But,” Maria says, “we always have tried to be together for dinner, since the children were babies. And we taught them to stay at the

table: my sons, even when they were babies, knew that at dinnertime they had to stay in their seats, even if only for half an hour, because staying at the table is pleasant. They understood this very well!"

Does the family discuss important things at dinner? "Yes," Maria answers, "the problems emerge; sometimes we discuss, sometimes we quarrel, but sometimes we also laugh, so much! In fact our son Matteo, who now is in England, misses this a lot, being around a table in front of a nice dish of pasta and talking about everything.

"And when there are guests, the concept is the same, that is, being happily at the table. There is more care in the presentation of the table and the food. But," Maria says (even if she is not boasting!) that when they dine alone they never have quick, sloppily conceived dinners. "It's always a nice ritual, and we are keen on it." The table is set well, even just for the four of them. Good food, prepared at home and eaten respectfully and affectionately, integrates her family. Pino's reflections on his mother's provisioning is the story's other side—a gesture of Italian motherhood that includes control as well as love. The identity of the mother, which we will examine in the next chapter, derives much of its power from providing for the family. Given that so few of the women we interviewed have children (the overall Italian pattern seen up close), we wonder what will happen to this important element of Italian social life. What will it mean to be an Italian woman when there no children to provide for? when the grandmother has no grandchildren to shower affection on?⁵

CONNECTION TO FAMILY

For Stefy, recently married to Piergiorgio, dinners connect her with her husband as well as his family. As in the case of Mara, her mother-in-law, dinners are where the rhythms and challenges of the day are communicated, where people listen and "exchange opinions." As is now common, Stefy's work has led her to the compromise of a "quick sandwich, standing"—what she calls "industrial food" for lunch. But that does not so much diminish family life as concentrate it in the evening. Then she eats at home with Piergiorgio. They also dine at her mother's one or two times a week, which she calls "a liberation, because she prepares the food. We agree upon the menu the day before, so we always have our favorite food. She wants to cook the food we like, to please us." They are not special dishes, Stefy says; they may be very simple. "But they are prepared according to our tastes."

Luca and Anna, grown children of Lucia and Franco, eat at home most days, although it takes a big effort on their parts. We ask the parents, How it is organized? What must happen to make it meaningful?

Lucia, their mother, tells us the lunches do not call for elaborate dishes or fancy posturing. Since Franco is retired, they are pleased to adapt to their

children's busy schedule, at least within limits. Meeting with the family should not be forced; it should be a pleasure from both sides. "Of course," Franco says, "this requires that their availability coincide with our schedule!" Lucia adds, "We make an effort to meet as a family at least once a day. For me it is very important."

In the families we studied, domestic partners, and especially parents and their children, used the table for meaningful discussion. We asked Franco and Lucia, "When you are at the table, what do you talk about?" Franco answered: "About everything." Lucia agreed, "Yes, about everything." Both the kids are in their twenties—not typically an era in which there is full disclosure between the generations. Lucia told us, "The girl is more communicative; Luca is a little bit guarded about his personal life. The girl is more open. She tells us everything, about her work problems, about what she does outside. I don't think she tells us one hundred percent, but near; I think her brother tells us eighty percent."

Both generations enjoyed the other's company in the dinners I was invited to, and husbands and wives seldom quarreled. Serious issues are often brought up, and Italian families have their share of things to work out. These include issues young American adults often resolve alone: apprenticeships to consider, jobs to secure, housing to locate, families to begin. Because in Italy children usually become adults while living at home and often stay there a full decade longer than do children of other industrialized countries, a regular sounding board between parents and children is especially important.⁶

As much as the dining experience is about family discussion, it also must take on the television. Italians are extraordinarily addicted to their televisions (even Patrizia!), and every couple must negotiate whether it should be on during dinner and what role it should play. For some, like Costantino and Maria, it is on but "at low volume," presumably to catch highlights of the news. Others families disagree about the TV; one member of the couple argues for its elimination and the other wants it on, reasoning that Italians talk over it anyway. Lucia stated, "In fact, when we set up the house we did not want the TV in the kitchen. Because when there is the TV in the kitchen you listen to the news and you can't talk to each other. We eliminated the TV so we could talk to our kids and vice versa."

And how does the family rhythm change when there are children? Only one family we studied had a young child. We are reminded that Bologna has the lowest birth rate in the world (see note 5), and our data were consistent with this pattern. Chiara told us how her family's life around the table was affected by the birth of her and Francesco's young child, Domenico *secondo*.



Chiara and Domenico secondo

With the birth of her son, she pays more attention to cooking, seeking lighter and more healthy food, and the rhythms of the dinner have changed too. “Francesco and I used to stay at the table after dinner, talking, smoking a cigarette, eating a piece of chocolate. Now it is always a run, because Domenico gets fed up, and when he finishes his dinner he wants to go, and you have to follow him, etc. So the length of the dinner changed. Domenico takes part in the lunch, but after a quarter of hour he wants to go to his little car, he wants to do this and that, and somebody has to go with him. So it is no longer a quiet lunch that can go on for two or three hours.” But they carry on, and they will teach Domenico how to live the Italian way. The family dynamics stretch with the arrival of a child but do not break.

COUPLES IN LOVE

Couples create a lot of their relationship around food. This is poetically expressed by Side, in her late sixties, who answered Patrizia’s question “Do you always eat together?” by saying, “Yes, because Marco waits for me. For Marco not eating together is like not eating at all.”

Cristina put it this way: “For me eating is to give and to receive love. And Sandro is great in that. For example, the other night he arrived home with a

panettone [a Christmas cake several months out of season], and I said, ‘Sandro, it is not Christmas yet!’ But he is made this way, and I think that, from this point of view, I have been very lucky to find Sandro, because my first husband was the opposite. Instead Sandro gives this love.”

Does she always have dinner with Sandro?

“Always,” Cristina answers, “except when I am on duty in the hospital. For us the dinner is very important.”

“And for lunch?” Patrizia asks. “One day you told me that you are very sad if you have to eat a sandwich alone.”

Cristina explains, “For me lunchtime is a critical moment, because when I was a little girl I was always alone. Coming back from school, I ate alone in the kitchen. So I felt a terrible anguish.”

She now eats alone because of her work schedule, which does not coincide with the lunch breaks of her colleagues. But for almost twenty-five years she did have a family lunchtime ritual, except on Saturday and Sunday. Now during the week, at one o’clock or a quarter past, Cristina “feels a terrible anguish. . . . Even if I am in the operating room, a terrible anxiety comes upon me, because of my wish to have a family coming home and reuniting around the table. I did not have this family for a long time, so at this time of the day I desperately try to survive. I feel very badly; the anxiety reappears. So I work until three or longer to keep myself from thinking about this.”

“At what time is the crisis over?” Patrizia asks.

“By four o’clock,” Cristina answers, “but I do not eat, because the thought of eating a sandwich alone gives me a feeling of despair. Sandro knows this, and when possible he comes around two or two-thirty to pick me up and we eat a sandwich, but together. Anyway, you know, it is not always possible, so . . . for example, yesterday I finished work in the hospital around two, and felt a great anxiety, and what did I do? I went to a restaurant alone, hoping to recuperate. I ate a salad, because I must not gain weight. . . . I am compelled by the idea of a warm family—my mother draining the pasta! I have been in psychoanalysis for seventeen years, so you can imagine! Eating represents affection, and eating alone destroys me. These photos [she is looking at the photos of the party we attended at her home]—it is so nice seeing the house, the skillet; it is a matter of affection, of love. The idea is to be together, to love each other.”

Cristina tells us, “I am very fine with Sandro. I like very much to eat with him alone. On Sunday we put a clean tablecloth and flowers on the table. Sandro buys the flowers and the pastries; it is not the idea of eating the pastries, but the idea of his coming with the package, that reminds me of my grandfather.”



Marco and Side



Maria and others have spoken of how they connect to their partners through food. Elena said it simply: “I like cooking; I do not get bored. I make dishes in my mind; I invent. Even when it is just the two of us; it does not change. It is the happiest time when I make food for my family; in Romagna the families are very close, they love each other. It is very nice.”

For Egeria, food weaves the fabric of her relationship with her husband, Ugo. We had attended a dinner party given for the doctors who had cured him of malaria, and we asked if the elaborately prepared food had been the evening’s main point.

She answers: “No, the food is not a pretext. It is like if, excuse me, when you fucked the sex were a pretext. The sex is important, but many other things are also important. In the same way, the food is important, even if many other things are also important. As the Bible says, ‘There is no banquet without music,’ so in the same way there is no banquet without conviviality—that is the hug, the connection. So you cannot distinguish the food from the other elements; it is an overall meaning.”

We ask if “the care, the ensemble specific to those nights,” are also part of their everyday life. Egeria replies, “The night is the moment when Ugo and I meet. And the food is never a careless and ugly thing; there is not a bag with the ham inside. There are small additions to make the food beautiful: a small thyme branch in the zucchini soup, bread crumbs over the roasted trout. They are part of that famous connection that you can also make at the kitchen table. Maybe I am overly sentimental; anyway I believe in this.”

Food connects networks and family relationships: child to mother; mother to family; wife to husband; husband to children. In the Italian version these connections are deep indeed.

FOOD FIGHTS

But life around the Italian table is not always rosy; there are unappreciative guests, and all couples and families squabble from time to time. Maria told us that when each party is over and the guests are gone and the kitchen a mess, she ponders both the quality of the food and the “gaiety and harmony” that had been achieved. There are always elements she would like to have done more perfectly. Sometimes she must prepare food for parties to support her husband’s career, for people she does not know or does not like. But, in her words, she still puts love into the food and stays at the table “with cordiality and tolerance. But,” she says, “it would be just as well if some people could stay home!”

There are those who have aversions to food but love the company of the dinner. Maria prepares food for a friend who will “taste the bread and dirty the dish” and do her best to contribute to the conviviality of the evening. But for Maria, her friend has not experienced the party; you have to participate as well as observe. When Isabella brings her tomatoes and *prosciutto* (her current diet food) to Patrizia’s and passes up the food Patrizia has prepared, it feels as though she has dropped a blotch of tomato sauce on the white tablecloth of the evening.

Families or couples also argue with food. When she and Costantino quarrel, Maria says, “we eat bread and cheese. Then the boys say, ‘Is there something wrong?’”

Other couples keep their meals intact even in the midst of an argument. When they are in a crisis, Giorgio told us, “we eat together, but in silence,” and Bassano laughed knowingly. Marina offered that “the dinner reigns sovereign.” To which Giorgio added, “There may be an atmosphere you can cut with a knife, but you can’t touch the dinner!”

Daniela weighed in: “The dinner is sacred, did you understand? And there is not a fight big enough to cause loss of the appetite—it doesn’t exist!”

When eating together does not produce the social cohesion that parents want, they turn to friends. This was the case for Egeria, who said, “The parties are more with friends than with family, if as family I mean our daughters. I tried with some distant relatives, but it became too tiring. So now I believe that my family has expanded.”

Scenes from two films show how Italian culture resolves conflict through food. In Pasolini’s *Mamma Roma* (1962), the protagonist, a prostitute trying to make good, trades insults with the country bride of her previous pimp. They do this at the wedding banquet, singing improvised, rhymed verses expressing sarcastic and phony goodwill. But the feast is a ritual strong enough to withstand insults that would otherwise apart tear the social fabric. The second film is Stanley Tucci’s 1996 *Big Night*, where two immigrant brothers, Primo and Secondo (they take their nicknames from parts of the Italian menu), have seen

their restaurant fail. After a spectacular party they stage as an inadvertent last hurrah, the brothers come to blows and insults sufficient, one imagines, to destroy their relationship forever. The following morning the elder brother enters the kitchen and carefully prepares an omelet; his brother, the cook, emerges from the corner where he's been sleeping off the alcohol and violence of the night before, and they sit down to eat together. They're okay.

THE MEANING OF PARTIES

Italians party a lot. It is remarkable. There are small dinner parties that overlap with special family dinners, parties for friends that center on food, and lavish, expensive dinner parties. Some are spontaneous gatherings, others require elaborate preparation. The parties are mostly rituals of friendship, but they reach further than that; when you have the luck to become a friend of an Italian, you find yourself invited as well.

I was struck by how much people enjoyed each other's company, even when they have seen each other just a few days before. Much ado is made of these parties, and they always include food, even when they are not sit-down dinner parties. Patrizia once organized a costume party, but even at that event there were plates of food. The dishes were not treats or snacks but pastas, risottos, antipasti—virtually the same foods one would have for a normal dinner. At the parties we attended there was always wine but never spirits or beer (except when pizza was served); people drink and enjoy each other, but I've never seen an Italian drunk at one of these events.

As our second Silvia (*due*) told us, "Bologna is special because people know each other; people meet each other, people become friends through sharing the same dinner, the same lunch. We use the word *conviviality* to describe how we spend time together. We will eat together, sharing good moments together, having fun together, while having food together."

Dani and Giorgio agreed that they concentrate everything on the dinner. Bassano added, "The dinner gives me the opportunity to have more time to spend with people. I don't like the after-dinner get-togethers because they must be very short. And when the dinner is here, I take care to choose dishes the guests like. But the most important thing is to eat together."

They may plan a dinner party because they are hungry for a particular dish and in the process remember a friend who also likes it, and presto, an excuse for a party!

A dinner party is an opportunity to chat, to share food and to connect socially. Italians often dine out, sometimes for social occasions, but a common sentiment was expressed by Isabella: "Restaurants are too formal; pizzerias are

too crowded and loud; *trattorie* are full of tourists. The best place is home.” In Giorgio’s words, “Sitting around a table you can have a good conversation,” and that is the point of the evening.

Does a party require fancy food? When Patrizia plans parties, the food is excellent but not exotic. For Giorgio, a party requires abundance, but it is the same as they would prepare for themselves. For Dani and Marina, the food is generally richer, more elaborate, more expensive. They might prepare *spaghetti allo scoglio* (pasta with fresh seafood), but then again they may also make that special food for their own celebrations—birthdays, anniversaries, shared with friends. Family cuisine merges with party fare.

Parties are more similar than dissimilar across the social classes. We asked Barbara and Carlo which they prefer: dinner at home, dinner at a restaurant, or going to the cinema, theater, or a concert. Their answer: dinner at home! Barbara explained, “I always regard it as the more satisfying night. Even if it’s just a pizza with friends, the important thing is eating together. For me, eating together includes a lot of things. Of course, if there is a dinner, there is the preparation, the choice of the wine, and here the pleasure begins. And after dinner you share and prolong the pleasure. I think they always are the most beautiful nights. Anyway, the night that starts with a dinner is also the one that lasts longer.”

Franco and Lucia regularly invite people to their home to eat, and they also meet their friends in restaurants. As we have heard said before, Franco tells us, “The table has a certain importance—it stimulates the conversation.” Maybe they invite too many people, Lucia wonders, but then she reaches a different conclusion. “Our kids have grown up,” she says, “so [now] we often have people for dinner or lunch, even without much planning. Next Thursday we will have a dinner for some of Anna’s colleagues. She is apprenticed in a law office, and she invited the lawyers working there to dinner: ‘Mom, prepare the fish, they feel like coming!’ So Thursday we’ll have fish. Next week we will go out for dinner with my brother, and with other friends we have planned a dinner here in two weeks. So we have people for dinner often . . . so we can say the table is important.”

Their schedule pictures a satisfying retirement (and they are only in their late fifties): cultural events in the center city of Bologna, friends dropping by informally, and one fine dinner after another. And a good relationship with their children, who bring their associates and friends home for dinner.

Patrizia and I were invited to a party organized by Egeria, whose guests included several of the elite of Bologna. Egeria describes her party as did families from other locations on the social map: “I wanted them to appreciate the spirit of the night, because for me it is not just a matter of feeding them; I’d like to create an event that has a series of connections. These include the involvement



Roberta, Domenico, and Chiara at the vineyard

of people through the dedications, the cultural statements that touch you in a different dimension, the music. I mean, the evening should become a small island in a frantic world.”

I was invited several times to Roberta and Domenico’s four-hundred-acre vineyard. The vineyard is used most weekends to entertain members of the family (Chiara has two siblings, both with families) or friends. These are some of my fondest memories of Italy, eating or not. Chiara explained, “The country house *is* my mother and my father—it is the metaphor of my mother and father’s unity. And they decide all the things together, from the biggest to the smallest. For example, for a long time we wanted to give my mother a dishwashing machine, and for a long time she said that if we buy it she will throw it out the window. The house is the family meeting point, either formal or informal. It is the house for our family’s formal events, like marriages or baptisms, or for more informal parties, such as a lunch planned for five people on Sunday that ends up being for twenty-five, since unexpected relatives and friends arrive. From this point of view it is also a very open house, even if my parents decide how it is run.

“All of us use that house: my parents use it all the time; we three brothers and sisters, who have our own families, use it depending on the phase of our life. When the kids are young, the house is a very nice meeting point for



Elena, Laura, and Vincenzo

them. My brother's three sons grew up there. Now my brother goes less often because he has two teenaged daughters and they have different desires, like meeting their friends on a Sunday. And this happened also to me: until I was thirteen or fourteen, I spent every Sunday there, and I remember that when I was between fourteen and eighteen every Saturday there was a fight between my parents and me because I did not feel like going to the vineyard. For my sister's sons it has been the same, and now for my brother's. So Francesco and I currently use the house more than the others in our generation. For me it is a relaxed moment, because I know Domenico [her toddler] will not get lost; there are the grandparents, so I can rest while Domenico has fun, because there is everywhere a small bird, a lizard. He goes around the vineyard with my father and the dogs. Of course when Domenico is fourteen or fifteen years old, things will be different.

“During the teenage years there is a different use of the house. For example, recently my sister's youngest son gave his first party there. From the teenage years until about twenty-five years, they ask to use the house for parties with their

peers. So New Year's Day is always overbooked, because the house provides the opportunity to meet one hundred people without the worry of going to a disco. In these cases, my mother takes the necessary precautions: she insists that they clean the house before and after the party. I mean, there are some rules!"

Elena and her family live the good life in the nearby resort town of Rimini, where they have many friends. Elena says, "Every night we have parties!" They cook, and they eat and dance. I ask, "How many days a week?" and Laura, her forty-year-old daughter, says, "Every night, or at least three or four times a week." In Bologna, Elena says, they have acquaintances; in Rimini they have friends.

Laura: "*La dolce vita*!"

"*La dolce vita*," I agree. The sweet life.

Elena describes their big feasts for the New Year: A big dinner, always, with their friends. Forty, fifty people. "All friends," Laura says. "So," her mother explains, "big dinner!"

Silvia *due* remembered the formal parties her grandfather, a leading businessman of Bologna, had organized around food. She has recently married and misses the conviviality of her parents' table, which she hopes to re-create in her married life.

Silvia certainly possesses the necessary talent to do so. She describes a party she organized at the end of her one-month stay in the United States, where her husband briefly worked. Food, Italian style, was the reason for the party and undoubtedly, the basis of its success. I doubt if that small town in Kansas has stopped talking about it.

"Before we left the U.S.," Silvia begins, "I organized a gigantic Italian dinner for everyone. Thirty-five people. A big pasta party where it was very nice for me to offer my culture. I cooked only pasta, but five kinds. Pasta with *ragù alla Bolognese*. *Maccheroni*, a pasta like lasagna, very similar. *Carbonara* with tomato, spices, and cheese. *Fettuccine* with vegetables."

"And can you tell me about the sauces for these pastas?"

"Pasta *ragù*—that's with pork and beef that's ground up very fine. I cooked *ragù* sauce with the meat mixed with carrots, onion, cinnamon."

The recipe?

"Begin with vegetables. Cook them with olive oil, and then mix in the meat. An hour later, I add the tomato sauce and cook it very slowly, very slowly. Three hours total. After the tomato, more time; then increase the heat and we have the sauce, a *ragù*! Pork and beef, no garlic. Tomato sauce, olive oil; no other spices except salt, just a little bit. No *basilico*. This is *ragù*!"

"I'm going to make this. I love *ragù*, but I never knew how really to make it Bologna-style, so thank you."

Silvia continues, “Three hours, you keep stirring it all the time. It cooks very slowly. Olive oil only at the start. Not so much.”

“Next?”

“*Carbonara* is twenty minutes.”

“Cream?”

“No cream. We make it differently from how you make it in the United States. Italian *carbonara* is made with bacon, cut small and cooked with olive oil, ten minutes. That’s when you boil the pasta separately. In another pot you add eggs; if you are four people you can use three eggs. Add parmesan, much parmesan; salt, just a little bit. One drop of milk, just a little. You mix it very well, no fire under the eggs. When you take the pasta out of the water, you put it in the pot where you are cooking the bacon. You switch the fire off; it’s very hot, you mix the egg mixture in.”

I ask, “Garlic? Onions?” “*No!*” she retorts.

“And the lasagna?” I ask. “How did you make it?”

“For sauce, well, you use the *ragù*. And then for the béchamel you need the flour, *farina*. Milk, you mix it very well with the flour . . . you can put just a little bit of butter at the start, then you put in flour and milk, the milk very slowly; you mix it, wait ten minutes. Always you have to mix it very well; salt, just a little bit. If you want, you can add parmesan, but just a little bit. Then you put one layer of noodles and one of *ragù*, and one of béchamel, and then pasta of the same. No mozzarella. No tomato—tomato is inside the *ragù*. No mozzarella! No meat!”

“Okay, so that’s three. What’s the fourth one?”

“Olive oil, garlic, without the green inside,” Silvia says. “The green inside is called the ‘soul of the garlic’—we don’t want it here. Onion cut up; five minutes, fire is low, with the pepper and the oil and the garlic with onion. After five or ten minutes, it depends, you can put in the tomato sauce or fresh tomato. Cook for ten minutes more. Cook the pasta, fettuccine or *maccheroni*, depends—Italian brand, though. You remove the pasta from the water, put the pasta in the sauce, finish cooking the pasta and the sauce together in the same pot. Switch the fire off. And then you add the ground *parmigiano*. Season it; it’s ready.”

“I’m getting very hungry. What’s the fifth one?”

“Italian vegetables. With olive oil, garlic at the start, but you can put green vegetables like zucchini, basil . . .”

“So you say that basil, *basilico*, is a vegetable, not a spice?”

“Good question,” Silvia says; “theoretically it should be a spice, but you can use basil in such a quantity that you can practically consider it as a vegetable. This is *pasta verde*. Green noodle, you know? You can make it with both green pasta and the white pasta. In this case it was a white pasta and vegetables. You add onion, and you mix it all together, all the vegetables and the pasta, and so



Silvia (*due*) and Andrea

you can use an onion to emphasize the flavor. The vegetables are cooked in just a little bit of olive oil and just a little bit of water, but no cover—just a little bit. The onion loses water while cooking, and the vegetables are cooking in the water of the onion, so this is why onion emphasizes the flavor. When the pasta is almost cooked, you remove it and put it into the pot with the vegetables for one minute. You cook the pasta and the vegetables together. Moderate heat. There is only one occasion when you don't cook the sauce, it is the egg for the carbonara, because if you cook the egg, it becomes a sort of omelet."

I ask her what these people thought of the pasta she prepared for them. She says, "They were very happy."

"A very nice thing," Andrea, her husband, adds, "was that thanks to this pasta party, Americans living in the same village, who were neighbors but had never met, met at the Italian dinner at our house. We were the only foreign couple living in town. So every time she went out for shopping or whatever, she met someone—'Oh, you are one of the Italians, how are you doing? . . .'"

Silvia finishes, "I met many people!" And so the conviviality crossed borders.

We see how food creates sociability. Not surprisingly, being uninterested in food or not eating in the same manner as others (such as happens during a diet) diminishes one's social life.

For example, Isabella's "constant dieting" affects her social life. She told us, "Okay, for instance, two nights ago, I organized a seminar at my institute. I had the speaker of the day coming from Rome. So when these people come, I take them out for dinner, or, with other people, we organize something. So that night, I said, 'Well, I'm on a diet.' And he said, 'Oh, you cannot leave me alone tonight!' And so I brought this guy home and I cooked for him and another colleague. But, you know, I ate my little things in front of people eating pasta!"

All the love experienced through food does not mean that Italian culture is saturated with love at the expense of other entertaining human qualities such as jealousy, pettiness, or manipulation. Indeed the intensity of Italian sentiment sometimes seems, at least to an analytical Anglo-Saxon, to be excessive. Cristina's dinner party was to raise money for the "homeless dogs of Romania." The homeless dogs had become a cause célèbre for our host and her friends, and the climax of the evening was a home movie—jerky shots taken out a car window on a recent trip to the capital of that woebegone country. The video showed ragged dogs off in the distance standing in the rain, dejected and pathetic. The sound track was saccharine and shrill, and the audience cried out over and over: "Povero cane, povero cane!" (Poor dogs!). In fact they all really cared about the dogs and raised money for a "dog orphanage" that would take a lot of work and dedication. But it struck me that one would not experience such sentiment over a similar situation in the States. Italy is passion expressed at an extreme pitch, reinforced with food, no matter the subject.

Tim Parks, a British writer living in Italy with his Italian family, describes the expression of Italian sentiment, reenacted when his in-laws arrive and descend on his toddlers:

It would be truly hard to exaggerate the cooing and crying and sighing and kissing and nose-tweaking and exclamations and tears and tickles and cuddles that now have to take place. The children must imagine they are the only people in the whole universe. Nonna [Grandmother] lifts up Michelle and dances round and round with him and '*O che bel bambino! O che ometto splendido! O che spettacolo!*' She holds him up to her hawkish face, rubs noses (losing some powder from hers), then swirls him round again, then crouches down to put her own old cheeks next to his. And now Stefi catches up, toddling and waddling down the path, and the whole extravagant process has to be repeated: the whirling in the air, the nose rubbing, the kissing.⁷

It's what the Italians enthusiastically call *fare festa a qualcuno*, which, literally translated, means "to make a party for someone" and combines the ideas of welcoming them and smothering them with physical affection. Comparison of this expression with the slightly disapproving "to make a fuss over" speaks worlds about the difference between Italian and English approaches to such occasions.⁸

Food is love; love is energy and it is excessive. It is the Italian spirit, a source of joy to those inside the culture, and a source of mystery for Anglo visitors. It cannot be denied, and it cannot be faked. It is much of what it means to be Italian, so noticeable to an outsider fortunate to be a visitor.



Maria prepares dessert, with love.



Power

“WHEN GOD REALIZED HIS TASK WAS GREAT, HE CREATED LA MAMMA . . .”

IT IS ONE OF THE CURIOSITIES OF ITALY THAT EVEN IN THE HEYDAY OF FEMINISM, EVEN IN TIMES WHEN THE ONLY CHILD IS LEFT WITH HIS GRANDPARENTS WHILE MOTHER IS OFF TO WORK, THE MAMMA MYSTIQUE HAS LOST NONE OF ITS ATTRACTION AND POWER.

Tim Parks, *An Italian Education*

WE STUDY WOMEN’S POWER AND SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF Catholicism, poverty (historically situated), and regionalism (the north versus the south). Our question has to do with how food influences the identity of the modern Italian woman; in the next chapter we look at divisions of labor created by the family food worlds of Italy.

MADONNA AND MAMMA

We are interested in the cultural values associated with central stories of Catholicism. We speak of Mary, the Madonna, who is referred to by Italians as *la vergine*, the Virgin. The argument, so common as to be taken for granted, is that Italian women are in some deep but unstated way associated with Mary, that the messages and metaphors of her life are about theirs as well.

At the center of the “Mary construction” is the quality of purity (Mary is believed to have been born without sin, and in Italy she is believed to have remained a virgin through her life) and her experience of suffering. As the mother of Jesus and witness to his crucifixion, Mary gained wisdom and humility born of pain and sacrifice. The Italian sociologist Luisa Accati asserts that the Madonna represents the defining difference between Protestantism and Catholicism, where there is a “powerful church with hegemony over the symbolic mother,



"Men carry statue of Patron Saint in Festival Procession: Festival of Maria Assunta all'Abbazia of Monte Cassino. August 15, 1950." (Original caption.) Photographer unknown.

and which has made the material image the symbol of the Church itself, since the Church is the Madonna, the mother *par excellence*.⁷¹

In tiny villages Mary is displayed in primitive monuments, and she is ubiquitous in Italy's grand traditions of painting and sculpture; her image and figure adorn the thousands of churches throughout Italy. Her suffering is described in her expression and bearing. She is the greatest mother perhaps because she suffered the most. It is one thing for God to have given up his Son (for he will return to heaven to sit at God's right hand); it is quite another for the mother to witness his torture and death and then live out her life without him.

Does it make sense to trace the intensity of the modern Italian mother-son relationships, with its pattern of indulgence and nearly lifelong dependency, to this mythic presence of Mary? We heed Paul Ginsborg's warning (with which he introduces his discussion of this question) that "it is all too easy to translate archetypes into stereotypes, and dangerous to use either as the basis for gen-

eralizing about contemporary Italian families.”² Yet Ginsborg, one of the most important and influential historians of modern Italy, connects the social role of the modern Italian mother to precisely these roots. He refers to the Virgin Mary and the Mediterranean *Grande Madre* through the words of the Jungian psychologist Ernst Bernhard: “The Mediterranean ‘Grande Madre’ is in Italy a primitive mother. For the most part she spoils her sons with the maximum of instinctiveness, and as a result her sons are exigent. But the more she spoils them, the more she makes them dependent upon her, and the more natural appear her own demands upon her sons, the more they come to feel tied to her. At this point the good mother, protective and nourishing, is transformed into her own negation.”³

Ethnographies of post–World War II Italy detail numerous rituals that celebrate Mary in one form or another. For example, Sydel Silverman’s study of a central Italian *mezzadria* village includes a detailed description of a mid-Lenten ritual in which the mother is ritually killed in retribution for her controlling power. It is the ritual of *segavecchia*, which translates as “the sawing of the old woman.” Dramatizations of the story are carried out by groups of six to ten men, who masquerade through the town and countryside offering performances of a play in which an old woman, who is a wife and mother, insists on dancing even though it is mid-Lent. Her husbands and sons try to stop her, asking her to pray for guidance and forgiveness, but she becomes wilder and forces her husband to dance with her. He remembers her as young and beautiful and is saddened by her ugliness, her age, and her scandalous behavior. He wishes her dead. The sons join in, telling her of the sorrow and pain she has caused them. The old woman knows they intend to kill her, and she curses them. They attack and saw her in half.

Shocked, they pray for forgiveness and seek a doctor, who requires a bribe. Once paid off, the mother is repaired and wakes and forgives her husband and sons. In this ritual there is, Silverman says,

a dramatic inversion of values. The revered symbol of church and family life within the church, the Mother-wife, is overturned and exposed for all her faults. She is shown as the reverse of the ideal: ugly, self-serving, uncontrolled, sexual, troublesome, subversive of those who would be virtuous. Those who denounce her are the men who are supposed to idolize and protect her, the men ordinarily regarded as sinners who must be retrieved by her purity. Finally they commit the unthinkable. . . . It is significant that this portrayal occurs precisely at the beginning of the church festival period that will center upon the Mother in her most idealized form, the sorrowing Madonna. The dramatization explores the negatives of all virtues of the Mother-Madonna. Then it yields: the *vecchia* is restored to life, and husband and son welcome her, reluctant but chastened.⁴

Can this cultural ritual be part of the near mystification of the Mother/Mary figure—a difficult burden for mere men to handle? To answer this question, we first review studies of the Italian family done several decades ago. We then note how women's roles were transformed by Italian feminism and the counterculture (the experience of many of our subjects, Patrizia included). Finally, we ask our subjects to reflect on how provisioning for the family influenced their own family life within the framework suggested by this tradition of Italian cultural studies.

THE MOTHER ROLE IN EARLY STUDIES OF THE FAMILY

Anthropologist Anne Parsons, one of the most influential analysts of Italian families, studied southern Italian families in the post-World War II era, using visual projective methods (TAT cards—that is, visual symbols to elicit responses) and other forms of in-depth interviewing.⁵ Hers was one of several voices attempting to explain the why the Italian south remained mired in poverty as the northern half of the country began to prosper. Like many, Parsons saw the cause in the family structure: “Parents, or in particularly the mother, bring up children in such a way as to strengthen loyalties toward themselves rather than to move increasingly into a wider social context. This latter tendency is in turn associated with a definition of the world outside the family as hostile and threatening and very often as a source of temptations toward sexual or other forms of delinquency and dishonesty.”⁶

Parsons calls this the “centripetal force” of the mother-son relationship in the sense that their relationship turns back into the family rather than expanding it outward. In her view, it is the son rather than the daughter who transforms the worship of the Mother of Jesus into worship of “mother.” The penitent son is guaranteed the affections of the mother, who becomes his confidante and even his ally against the father. The mother and son satisfy most of each other's emotional needs, which creates a lifelong dependence, to the exclusion of the daughter and father. Thus forever dependent, he cannot confront his Oedipal competitor (his father) to symbolically slay him and move on; rather he is caught in a never consummated but forever engrossing relationship with his mother.

The father centers his attention on the daughter. At the point of her sexual maturity, she is defined as the “bride of Christ” and undergoes, in a white gown, her confirmation ceremony. The father manages her courtship and gives her away at her wedding (which she has mimicked in her confirmation ritual), and thus he oversees the abrupt breaking apart of the family, which allows the daughter to establish her own. When she becomes a mother of a son, she transfers her affections to him, and the cycle repeats itself.

Despite the declining influence of Freud in anthropology, Parsons's largely Freudian analysis of sentiment and social influence in the Italian family has held up well in the intervening decades. For example, in Ann Cornelisen's analysis, southern Italian women control Italian families, largely by dominating the son and by monopolizing food preparation and distribution:

There are no large decisions to be made by the men and the day-by-day existence is left to the women, who unconsciously take over the practical aspects of life. . . . Once a woman has power, however slight her influence appears to be outside the family, she consolidates it into a hold over her sons stronger than the famous boast of the Jesuits. Only death will loosen it, but already her daughter-in-law has learned the art of day-by-day living and day-by-day power and has tied her sons to her as firmly as though they were still swaddled. She has also slowly replaced her husband's mother, and he, accustomed as he is to the strength of women, does not notice it. He would, in fact, insist with aggressive pride, "*In casa mia, comando io!*" In my house I command.⁷

In the 1970s Thomas Belmonte lived among and studied Neapolitan subproletarians, and his is likely the most in-depth examination of the Italian poor. His study drew from a vast number of shared meals and conversations, observations of routine family discussions and arguments, and the kind of confused sentiment (a combination of love and despair) that accompanies the best ethnographies.⁸

The family consisted of Elena, wife and mother; Stefano, who worked in the informal economy, and several offspring. Elena is a magnificent cook, and despite their poverty she provisions the family, carrying to the crowded table "plates brimming with *maccheroni*, and bowls filled with cutlets, and fried peppers, and piles of bright boiled greens sprinkled with lemon and chopped garlic"; "plates of sweet fried sausage and chilled, home-pickled tomatoes"; "trays of green tomatoes and peppers *sott' olio*, under oil. String beans and the eggplant, marinating in *bottiglia*." Here is a working-class cook-artisan, providing her family with their single reliable source of pleasure. The family life that swirls around the food, however, is often raw struggle. A typical dinner has the following scene—Robertino is the five-year-old dictator of the family, Ciro his teenage brother:

Robertino squeals. Ciro is having his revenge. He has pulled down the boy's pants, and is grabbing him at the crotch. . . . "Look everyone, look at what a beautiful prick my brother has!" Rob retaliates by twisting Ciro's nose, with a single decisive wrench. He leaps to freedom and dashes to his mother's lap. But Elena is tired. Ciro is holding his nose and snarling. Elena looks imploringly at Stefano, "I can't make it anymore," she moans. "I just can't make it." Still, she strokes Rob's hair. His lower lip is pushed out to dramatize his sense of outrage. Elena whispers in his ear, to soothe him, "mussel soup, Easter cake" . . .⁹



Madonna in Bertinoro, a village in northern Italy.

How does this family hold itself together? Belmonte writes: “Diverse resources are donated to the mother. These ‘donations’ are often solicited from recalcitrant children by the father, for the mother. The mother then converts and redistributes these resources in the form of what for the poor is the most highly valued resource of all, palatable food.”¹⁰ The mother, Belmonte concludes, is the center of the storm the family has become because she controls what the family draws upon and relies upon the most: food and love.

Several years later, Victoria Goddard reexamined the Neapolitan working class and reinforced the earlier conclusions. As she notes: “The division of labor and space, the importance of women’s networks, the centrality of the children in the family and of food in defining membership within the household, contributed to making women and especially mothers central to household organization and family life.”¹¹

The roots of these arguments are deep. Ernesto De Martino, perhaps the most important Italian anthropologist of the post–World War II era, suggested



Bologna shop window. “Fantasy, with the force of three”—a reference to the Holy Trinity? The red lipstick on the nun’s face, several times life size (note the figure of a man on the left), made this a startling visual statement.

that tarantula cults of Puglia, excessive funeral weeping, and the “evil eye” customs resulted from family instability in the context of hopeless poverty.¹² Carole Counihan studied Sardinian carnivals in which men dressed as their grieving mothers to express what the Italian sociologist Paola Filippucci called “their anxieties about social and economic inferiority in the village and nation.”¹³ Frederick Friedman, studying Basilicata in the early 1950s, coined the term *alla miseria* to describe “a way of life and a philosophy of life: compounded of resignation and attachment to values like virginity and honor, ‘pitiful attempts’ to uphold individual and collective dignity in the face of economic, political and social deprivation.”¹⁴ These writers agree: poverty forces families in on themselves; and as a result the mother assumes the critical role as provider of food (generally with insufficient resources) as her relationships with family members (particularly the sons) take on a mythic resonance that connects to central themes of Catholicism.

We consider the role of sexuality in mothers and sons’ relationships with some caution. Sexuality in Italy is a complex cultural matter: preoccupation with sexual purity is so strong in the Italian south that *onore* (family honor) is bound up in a guarantee of virginity of a daughter at the point of her marriage. This contrasts mightily with the emphasis on sensuality found in many parts of the Italian culture. We might point to the recent popularity of the porn stars Moana



"We are arriving in Bologna."

Pozzi (now deceased) and Ilona Staller (Cicciolina), who appeared regularly on children's television programs and became admired public figures (Staller was also an elected politician). Public display ads often combine motherhood with sexuality; a 2007 advertisement in Rome portrays a life-sized mother in a small bikini; her young son, with a matching bathing suit, blends into her curves. But it seems reasonable to argue that the Italian mother retains a kind of emotional control of the son through food, which creates a difficult obstacle for the daughter-in-law to overcome. The cycle repeats as the latter focuses her attentions eventually on her own son.

The conflation of the Mamma and the Madonna is common in Italian popular culture. Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1962 film *Mamma Roma* presents Anna Magnani as Rosa, a Roman prostitute who is the single mother of a teenage son, Ettore. Her love for Ettore is far more sensual than motherly, and he returns that affection by falling for an older woman who resembles her. Magnani's character then arranges for the seduction of her son by one of her prostitute friends to draw him away from his love-interest, and she subsequently questions her friend as to the details of her son's sexual prowess. Ettore's life swirls into petty crime, and after being arrested in a foiled theft, he is locked in a cell and strapped to

a restraining device that mimics the cross of the crucifixion. He dies there of a sudden fever, and his mother, an irrepressible spirit throughout her travails, becomes the suffering Madonna. Throughout the film *Mamma Rosa* flirts with her son by spoiling him, putting food in his mouth, and lavishing him with attention. His dependence becomes a rage that leads to tragedy.

We return to Tim Parks, British immigrant married to an Italian, and now novelist and interpreter of Italian culture. His novelist's eye makes him a natural, if informal anthropologist, and he sees the Madonna repeatedly as an archetype and the mother as source of food and pleasure. For example, the Italian lullabies he is taught to sing to his children "feature the Virgin and her little boy. Very soon you begin to appreciate that, contrary to the Anglican tales I was told as a child at Sunday School, Jesus' claim to prominence depends only very marginally on his being the Son of God and far more importantly on his having the Madonna for his mother. In any event, the only vitally defining factor about these two is that he is her *bambino* and she is his *mamma*. She has no other men after him and he no other women. This is what has remained sacred. Everything else is accidental."¹⁵

Parks describes a "suffused eroticism" in mother-son relationships that recalls Parsons's analyses or Pasolini's *Rosa*, in as different an Italy as one could imagine. He writes:

Beyond diet and swaddling and coddling and funding, Mamma has something else to offer: a suffused eroticism. All those beautiful Madonnas, all the embracing, all the games near naked in the summer heat, the family siestas on the big bed with the shutters closed against a scorching sun, the nights together with Papá relegated to the kid's room. When Nonna [grandmother] hugs Zio [uncle] Berto, she squeezes hard and perhaps tickles him. . . . Here everything is properly caressed, properly talked about, thoroughly tickled. "My soul full of desire for love," writes D'Annunzio, "I think of your kiss, your trembling sighs, your gaze, your quiet laugh." One can't imagine even the most sentimental Englishman writing such lines to his mother. On the other hand, it's not for nothing that Italy has some of the leading theorists in group psychotherapy for families, not surprising that some young men have an extraordinarily inflated, mother-fed opinion of themselves and what is owed to them. It can be tough on Papá.¹⁶

When Parks questions his mother-in-law, she replies: "As my grandmother used to say, *All' amore dei figli, non c'e' amore che somigli*. To the love of children, no other love can compare."¹⁷

These studies, films, observations, and personalities seem to belong to the past. Italy has undergone deep cultural transformation, including feminism, a revised legal structure, new prosperity, and new cultural freedoms. Are the

patterns we have described above still evident in modern Italy? We begin by briefly reviewing the history of Italian feminism and then noting how it influenced several of the women we interviewed.

The roots of Italian feminism are in late nineteenth-century women's emancipation movements,¹⁸ but it was during the fascist era that the contemporary movement took hold. Fascism was not only a dictatorship but also a social vision that classified women as legally inferior in the home, in the workplace, and even in the sexual politics of marriage.¹⁹ But as was the case in several aspects of fascism, Mussolini set into motion contradictory tendencies. In the hope of encouraging population growth, his policies and public statements valorized the mother, and his policies integrated women into the workforce, but in secondary roles. Daycare centers began to liberate women from the home, and for some this led to political consciousness. Women were part of the antifascist movement, and, as we remember from Agnese's stories, some fought and died as Partisans during the war. At the war's end, however, as Italy slowly rewrote its legal code to rid itself of institutional fascism, women largely returned to domestic roles in the new middle class. During the same period the women's movement was reborn as the UDI (Unione Donne Italiane), first associated with the Communist Party in Italy. This was an uneasy alliance, given the Communist Party's unwillingness to support the feminist position on abortion. The party was largely male, sexist, and culturally Catholic. The women's movement, on the other hand, struggled with the concept of fighting for political and social equality as the penultimate goal of an Italian feminism.²⁰

This environment encouraged the development of modern Italian feminism, which was an aspect of a much larger, international movement for cultural change in the 1960s. Italian feminism, however, was structurally different from the feminisms of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While feminism in those countries largely took place in universities (leading to departments and programs in women's studies), it has never been institutionalized in Italian universities. Rather, Italian feminism drew upon female trade unionists, economists, academics, secretaries, flight attendants, and, especially, writers and journalists. Feminist organizations sprang up all across Italy, some focusing on film and video, others on issues relating to the workplace. Bologna is noted as having a women's organization sponsored and financed by the city council, yet it remained independent of the council. The *autocoscienza* (conscience-raising) method was a common element in Italian women's groups, as the political was linked to the personal, away from the prying male eye. There were many small presses and feminist publications, and even a national association, Parola di Donna, that linked them and represented them at international publishing venues. Italian feminists sponsored conferences, infiltrated politics, published magazines and books, performed studies of political significance, and in general

wove themselves into the web of Italian society. For all the status and financial rewards that university positions brought to feminists in the United States, the United Kingdom, and northern Europe, they have also marginalized feminism in those societies. The Italian version was forced, because of the conservatism of the university system, to become more relevant to the society.²¹

The result was a movement that defined women as *different* rather than *equal*. In 1970 Carla Lonzi, in her essay “Let’s Spit on Hegel,” wrote, “Feminism’s fight for women’s equality with men was misdirected, since equality is ‘an ideological attempt to subject women even further.’” She equates this with the struggle of indigenous people against imperialism: Equality is what is offered as legal rights to colonized people. And what is imposed on them as culture.”²² To assume male and female equality is, for Lonzi, to “obliterate” women, because the resulting “universal” is “theoretically asexual and practically [speaking] male sexed.” From this perspective, to achieve political equality women must first “agree to neuter themselves.” But becoming *like* a man is never going to be as good as *being* a man, and the previous gender identity available to women, tied to reproduction and mothering, was a second-rank status. The answer for Italian feminists was to celebrate womanhood, but not rationally, rather as a celebration of a form of human existence not only about women but knowable only by them.²³

These ideas were born in political struggle, including the political fights for abortion and divorce rights, won only in the 1970s. Less well-known legal reforms increased punishments for sex crimes and removed the burden of proof from female victims. Certainly a rejection of traditional women’s roles runs throughout Italian feminism. But at the same time, these oppositional politics also defined a movement in which women claimed a space to be women: elegant, skilled in the kitchen, motherly—in fact adopting many of the roles that women rebelled against in the first place.

Italian feminists refer to a “feminine feminism” as “an aesthetic of appearance and demeanor; a distinctive ethic of caring for and nurturing the physical and human environment; a defined configuration of the organization of the family,” where being a woman is a “pleasurable assertion.”²⁴ This characterization fits many of the women we interviewed. It reflects an acceptance of elements of a traditional gender identity, as well as a vitality and social power associated purely with the female gender.

FOOD AND THE COUNTERCULTURE

Many of our subjects were young adults during the cultural revolutions of the 1960s. For these women and some men, social change meant questioning traditional roles. For these women, including Patrizia, adulthood has led them



"Italians Picket Catholic Divorce Law. 6/7/1969. About 3,000 demonstrators hold placards in the famous Piazza Navona, during a demonstration in favor of divorce. The placards read 'NO TO CLERICAL DICTATORSHIP,' 'MARRIAGE FOR PRIESTS, DIVORCE FOR LAYMEN,' and 'ANNUL THE SACRED ROTA' (the Catholic Church's highest court for marriage annulments)." (Original caption.) Photographer unknown

back to Italian food culture, though not in the traditional female roles. Those who speak below are university educated and participated fully in the counter-cultural movement. It is unlikely that more traditional Italians would have shared this rejection of traditional culture.

Mara says that during that period "cooking was like wasting my time. . . . Losing some hours in front of the stove was a useless thing. Anything was good if it filled the stomach and allowed me to stay outside the house."

Was food unimportant?

"Yes," she tells us, "if I wanted to eat something particular I went to the restaurant. I was not a good cook! I was too involved in becoming emancipated! I preferred going to a trade-union meeting over coming home to cook. Actually, this is not completely true, because I eventually gave up the trade union and other things to spend more time with my family. But to be with

my family, not to cook for my family. It was an affective matter, not a gastro-nomic matter.”

Now she has evolved from “not a good cook” to being a very good cook, passing the gold standard test of being capable of making fresh pasta. Mara says her growing interest is due to her increasing free time, but it is also because she came to realize she liked it. Beyond that there was a particular reason: her mother-in-law. “She felt she was better than me,” Mara says, “because while I was a good employed woman she was a good cook. So she said, ‘I am better than you and also I save more money than you.’ At that time I did not have time to cook as she did, being engaged in my career. Now I have stopped working full time and I want to demonstrate, primarily to myself, that she was not better than me. It was just a matter of time, because if I have enough time I can do the same.”

Dino agrees with his wife: “We considered the food almost useless. But,” he says, “I would have eaten some *tagliatelle* at that time too!”

Clara migrated to Bologna, the most politically Left city in Italy, from Calabria, a region in the poor and conservative south. In “Red Bologna” she experienced the transformation of women’s roles during the countercultural period. Like Mara, she rejected the female role, but she retained tastes for food linked to the place she was born and raised. She tells us, “The fact I went to Bologna and rejected the traditional female role did not make me love the tortellini more than the pasta my mother cooked!”

I asked Patrizia about how her involvement in the counterculture had influenced her relationship to food. Her answer resembled Clara’s, in the sense that political liberation did not mean abandoning Italian food traditions:

“In the feminist period,” Patrizia says, “I refused to clean the whole house; I cleaned just my own spaces. I rejected the subordinated female role: all family decisions had to be taken together. Everyone could go out with her or his own friends. But the food had to be good! So I never rejected the tradition in relationship with the food! I agree with Clara when she said that in those years we had other things on our mind: politics, revolution. And most of our social life was outside, so eating together was less important than now. Anyway we continued to have meals in the family on Sunday or Saturday, and also to share the meal with friends. When I was younger I spent more nights out: at the cinema, *osteria* [an informal restaurant, mostly for wine and snacks], or political meetings. Getting older, I prefer to stay home with my friends around the table. And it is the same for most people I know.”

For these politically active women, food played a contradictory role. It symbolized gender roles rooted in centuries-long traditions and the fascist era. But Patrizia remembers that family rituals such as the Sunday dinner persisted during the countercultural era. The movement was organized around the table

and the food had to be good! Now Patrizia has adopted aspects of the previous food culture, but in the context of a social life with friends and family, cooking for the pleasure of it and the pleasure of the company it brings.

THE MODERN ERA

In the next chapter we examine the distribution of work in the modern Italian family; here we try to understand the identity of modern Italian women suffused with history and Italian traditions. Because women exist in a web of social relationships, we will also examine the relationships between men and women and women and their offspring, using the provisioning of the family as our focus.

There is evidence that the extraordinary changes in modern Italy have not fundamentally altered the emotional structure of the family and the role of food in family dynamics. Mothers remain the center of Italian families, “providers of a constant flow of totalizing care, directed primarily towards their child or children, but also towards their husband, their parents and often their husband’s parents as well.”²⁵

We begin with an empirical snapshot. In 1986 just under 70 percent of grown children lived in the same house, block of houses, or town as their parents, and only 13 percent lived more than thirty miles away from them. One-third of married men saw their mother every day, and more than a quarter saw her more than once a week. This pattern was only slightly stronger in the Italian south. Seventy percent of unmarried men over the age of thirty-five lived with their parents, as did one-quarter of those who had divorced.²⁶ Ginsborg quotes the journalist Laura Laurenzi: “Therein lies the confirmation that Italian men—whether single, regularly married, co-habiting, separated or divorced—demonstrate an evident reluctance, whether from choice or necessity, to distance themselves from the maternal embrace and from that formidable supplier of services constituted by a matriarchal home in which everything functions.”²⁷

It is difficult to explore these questions, given how loaded research questions on this subject would be. For example, I have never found a way to ask my Italian male friends about their relationships with their mothers, which seem from the outside about like the relationship I have with mine. The studies done in the 1950s used clinical interviewing—not our approach at all. Eventually it dawned on Patrizia and me that we might gain insights to this mystery by asking those responsible for cooking how they had gained their skills and what that had seemed to imply about the social worlds of their families. This shifted the focus from men and mothers to a focus on daughters as wives as well as partners or competitors with their mothers. We summarize those discussions from the vantage points of several positions in the family.

THE DAUGHTER'S VANTAGE POINT

An often-repeated theme in our interviews was the mother's unwillingness to teach the skills and knowledge that constitutes the family's working cuisine to her daughters, in the context of the great power that mothers draw from provisioning the family.

We begin with Egeria, who grew up in a small village. Professionals often came to the town for business, and they were invited to dinner due to her father's prominent role in the village. Large dinner parties were common, and Egeria developed a sense of how to organize them. But though her mother was an excellent cook, she did not become her daughter's teacher. We ask, "And did your mother teach you anything?" Egeria answers: "No. She—like every mother—thought I was incapable. And maybe I snubbed such feminine activity, because I was studying and interested in other things. Also, my kind of cuisine was not the same as my mother's. She cooked in a more traditional and elaborate way, requiring many days of preparation."

Cristina's memories are similar: "I never had any display of love from my mother; she always told me that I was stupid, that I would never succeed in becoming a doctor. And now she has stopped calling me stupid, but she never shows her love with, I don't know, a little gift—nothing, zero. My parents never gave anything to me, and I am not speaking about money; I'm speaking about an indication of their feelings. I always organize a dinner for my mother's birthday; there has not been one time that my father brought me something, even if only a rose. It is terrible. Nothing, never."

Now she and Sandro do not eat at her mother's house; their excuse is that her age makes her incapable of cooking and they would have to take everything to prepare there. But, she says, it was the same in the past: the mother might invite them, but they would find an excuse not to go. It is the lack of warmth: her mother's criticisms, expressed first in the kitchen. What Cristina wanted was her grandfather, "arriving home with the package of the pastries," symbolizing and actualizing the love of the family through food.

For Marina and Dani, the mother's power was connected to food. Marina told us, "It is true, for example, the mother tells the son, to the children, 'If you do this bad thing you will go to bed directly without dinner.' So a young kid says, 'I have to go out, to a disco.' And the mother says, 'What? You go without eating? You have to stay here for dinner first!' So it is a kind of blackmail. The table represents the place where the mother has power." Dani, who works with handicapped people, says the staff in her agency tend to use food as a threat and reward: "If you don't act better, you will not be fed." So, Dani summed up, "food is power," and because the workers are women, this re-creates the pattern found in the family. Patrizia drew the discussion together: "To deny food is to deny love. So the mother has great power."

Stefy had just married and was beginning her own family. She saw the mother's power as focused in her monopoly over food preparation, as well as the control of money and time. Because food figured so heavily in family budgets, controlling food meant controlling the family finances, and in having the exclusive right to announce dinnertimes the mother structured the day for the family. But, Stefy suggested, this is not a conscious identity. "Food is a kind of language in many Italian families. The mother is not aware of the power she commands as commander-in-chief of the food. Perhaps," she says, "you see it better as an outsider. Children learn life through food. '*Mangia, mangia!*' is the mother saying 'I love you!'" The Italian mother is very possessive. The modern Italian father is involved directly with the child, but in my mind, when a woman has a baby she thinks "This is my baby!" I don't want to be like this," Stefania says, "but I fear I will!"

How is this monopoly maintained? We asked several women, from the working class to the professional class, whether they felt their mother had felt a responsibility to pass on her cooking skills.

Isabella: "I think that I learned, and we all learned, without the help of the mother."

I ask Giovanna: "Did your mother teach you how to cook?"

She answers: "No!"

Isabella retorts, overhearing, "See, another woman in your study with the same answer!"

We ask Barbara, "From whom did you learn to cook? Your mother?"

"I learned something from my mother, but mostly by myself."

"You left home at a young age?"

"Yes," Barbara says, "in fact the first time I cooked pasta, I put *fusilli* in the cold water."

"And how did they come out?"

"Only good enough to throw away, of course."

I ask Rita, "Did your mother teach you to cook?"

"No, no!"

"Do you have any idea why not?" we ask. "Did this seem unusual?"

Rita explains, "No, because my mother believed she was a better cook than me. A part of it may be power. But it is also a form of love. A way of loving. I

don't know how to make *sfoglia*, or *ragù*, but I do other things very well that are not so typical."

For Side, food preparation was the center stage of her difficult relationship with her mother-in-law. The conflicts were resolved over several decades of taking orders, learning, and eventually, when her mother-in-law was no longer capable, taking over the kitchen. Because the mother-in-law lived with Side and her husband, her cooking competed with that of the mother-in-law, who was unwilling to relinquish the power it afforded. She maintained her control by humiliating Side rather than making her a partner in the kitchen.

Side tells us, "The first years were very hard. I got married when I was twenty, and I was inexpert about a lot of things. And my mother-in-law, who lived with us, was a colonel, with fists on the table. I'm not joking! For example, we wanted to change the living-room furniture, because it was half-broken, and she: 'As long as my eyes are open, nothing will leave this house!' I had a bad time. . . . I went to my mother's house to tell her what was happening, and she said: 'Remember, that is now your house.'"

So Side learned by watching her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law was a fine role model as a cook, for she "could make a meal with very few things. For example, if she had just two or three eggs and we were many mouths to feed, she mixed the eggs with some spinach, butter, and parmigiano cheese, and she made a big omelet—an omelet that all of us could eat."

The mark of a true Italian cook, at least in the north, is the ability to make *sfoglia*, the basic ingredient of all pastas (the word translates as "sheet," as in paper). Side's mother-in-law made pasta when she could afford flour and eggs. But eggs were expensive, and when the family could not afford them, they ate the industrially manufactured pasta (hard flour, made without eggs) from the south. Side says, with a shrug, "It's not bad with a bit of sauce!"

Their problem was a lack of money, and so they made do. "Sometimes," Side tells us, we ate fried potatoes, chicory, and bread and nothing else. That is really true!" She expects us to be surprised, but we are not. She concludes, "Anyway, we got to where we are today. We do not have money to waste, but we can allow ourselves something."

We asked Mara about how a feminist became a *sfoglia* maker. It was both because she had more time now and because her feminism had mellowed. But, as we noted earlier, it was also a matter of personal politics with her mother-in-law, who devalued her because she could not (or did not care to) master traditional cooking skills. Dino, caught between his mother and his wife, commented, "In my opinion, now you have also the passion to do it." Mara agreed but added

that arriving at home at seven in the evening, after working all day, she had often lacked the energy to assemble the ingredients and take on the pasta, to which Dino responded, a bit defensively: "Nobody required that!"

But was she emotionally involved in preparing the traditional dishes, as Dino seems to be emotionally involved in eating them? Mara answered, "No, I am just proud. I can say: 'Well, I am able to make the *tagliatelle*!' And I am proud to say to my mother-in-law: 'Look, I can do this thing that you called your masterpiece. But you cannot do the things I was able to do in my office!'"

When I was near the end of this book, I found myself at an dinner party at the home of Isabella. There I met Alberta, a woman in her early sixties, to whom I explained my theories about mothers, power, and food. I asked whether I had succumbed to the stereotyping I hoped to avoid. By way of response, she told me how she had grown up in southern Italy as the oldest sibling in a family that included her two brothers. From her perspective as a young woman, her mother had controlled and manipulated her brothers, typically through food. Resolved to have a different life, she moved to northern Italy, attended university, and at age twenty had a daughter intentionally out of wedlock. She developed what she called a "sisterly" relationship with her daughter, which made separation from her difficult now. She was concerned that she not become possessive, as her mother had been, and feels the transition had been successful. She and her daughter had become "coadults" in their new relationship. But for her brothers the situation is completely different. Now in their fifties, they never married or left home. The family house was remodeled to accommodate their semiautonomous lives. They still eat at their mother's table, and she still does their laundry. The youngest son rebelled by becoming a vegetarian (the mother's cuisine uses a great deal of meat), but, Alberta said, "I find this a very mild form of rebellion, at best!"

Carole Counihan saw similar patterns among the urban working class in Florence twenty-some years ago:

Tommasa was a great cook. Her daughter, forty-one when the interviews were done, "did not learn how to do it when growing up." . . . Perhaps because of jealousy of this important household domain, her mother Tommasa was reluctant to teach her to cook and never acknowledged that Sergia had any skill. Sergia recounted: "Oh, there was no way I could learn to cook with my mother . . . there was all the time in the world to learn. But never—there was no way to do it the way she does—even now, you know. When she used to come to visit me here, I always let her cook, because never has she said that I could make anything well."²⁸

Counihan subsequently recounts how not knowing how to cook had led Sergia to feel inadequate and ashamed. She didn't even know how to peel cucumbers; men invited to the house had to. "In my house there was no way to stand at the

stove because I would always be criticized. My mother always said, 'You don't know how to do anything.' What could I do—will you tell me? How could I learn? . . . ”²⁹

THE GRANDMOTHER AND THE GRANDDAUGHTER

Many women stated that it was their relationship with their grandmother that had taught them how to lovingly navigate Italian food worlds. Cristina said: “My grandmother, whom I loved much, taught me much. On the other hand, my mother told me I was not able to cook even a fried egg. She never allowed me to enter the kitchen. I mean, my mother never wanted me to cook, even a dish of spaghetti.” Her mother was a fine cook but “never passed anything on to me. My grandmother was exactly the opposite. I remember that once a week she made *crescentine*. It was a ritual, and we grandchildren stayed in the kitchen to watch her. She made *sfoglia*; she cut it and then she fried it in the skillet, and now I have her skillet. It was a really happy time.”

The grandmother is ideally adjusted to her stage of life and has moved beyond the competition she perhaps felt as a mother with a maturing daughter. She can be satisfied that her family has prospered, and she can take an active role in the lives of her grandchildren. However, few of the women we spoke to had grandchildren, so our theories are informal.

THE VANTAGE POINT OF THE MOTHER

The women we interviewed ranged from those hoping to become mothers to mothers of toddlers, and mothers of adults. For example, Lucia, who has a very positive relationship with her daughter, does not share the kitchen with her. We asked whether her children helped in the house, and she said, “Yes, and Anna helps a bit more.” Anna had worked with her mother as they prepared the lunch I shared with their family. Do they help with the cooking and shopping? Lucia said, “No, no! Because, like all mothers, I begin by saying: ‘Do not get this dirty’—you know, ‘leave the kitchen tidy’—so Anna doesn’t often cook with me. When I am out, she applies herself to the kitchen; she experiments; she tries new dishes. She loves the Indian kitchen, so she tries. She is quite good, yes.” We asked if she cooks for Lucia and her husband, to which she replied: “No, no!”

Not all mothers, however, are jealous guardians of their knowledge, skills, and kitchen space. Egeria’s daughters are not drawn to the exotic tastes of her party cuisines nor to her elaborate dinner parties. Egeria laughed as she told us her daughters “say I’m a bad cook and that I cook revolting food!” When she cooks at home, she prepares the food her family expects. Her more sophisticated tastes began to develop only after she married Ugo, a gourmet, thirty years ago.

We asked, “And your daughters do not appreciate your orientation to food?”

Egeria answered, “Even more, they are against it. When I cook at their place, it is always a drama. So when they come to my home I usually ask my maid to prepare the food. She cooks food from the Bologna tradition. My daughters grew up with tortellini; I don’t know where they got the taste, maybe at the school refectory.” She laughs.

Egeria seeks more emotional connection to her children than they are willing to give. She tries to create special Christmas celebrations that will provide them, she says, with memories. She tries to create feasts that will live on in their recollections, and she seems surprised when “sometimes it comes out that they remember a feast, or something . . . but they are not good witnesses of these events because of the usual conflict between the daughter and mother.”

“They do not appreciate your cooking skills,” Patrizia says, “but maybe they appreciate the moments you spend together around the food?” To which Egeria answers, “Who knows? Such moments are not very frequent since they got married, because they never got on well with each other and we always fought—as all respectable families do when they meet. So we have fewer of these ‘convivial’ family meetings.”

For Giovanna mothering is complicated by the fact that her preteenage daughter, Vittoria, spends time with her father, Giovanna’s prior domestic partner, who remains close to his mother (a common pattern in modern Italy). So there are now two adult females in her daughter’s life: the mother, who plays the role of food disciplinarian, and the grandmother, who indulges her granddaughter.

Vittoria must adjust to her mother’s and grandmother’s very different ideas about food. Giovanna explains, “In my opinion, Vittoria’s father has a very strange relationship with her about food. He gives her a lot of food since he cannot live with her and give his love all the time, so he thinks that giving food compensates. So I’m forced to keep control of the food I give her. It’s not because I want to. I have to ask, ‘What have you eaten today? . . . How many snacks . . . ?’ and then I decide what to do for dinner. So it is a bit complicated,” Giovanna says, “food and raising kids.”

Vittoria’s father often leaves his daughter with his mother (the grandmother), who, in Giovanna’s eyes, showers affection on her daughter through food. I asked Giovanna how her daughter deals with this, and she said, “Ah, well, she understood very early that there are two systems, and she takes advantage of the best things of both worlds! And anyway, I’m not a great cook. I just cook because I have to do it for her, and for my health, while on the other hand, her grandmother—where she goes when she is with her father—is a real old-style woman, a great cook who makes pasta by hand. So my daughter understood

immediately that her grandmother is a much better cook than me. So on that side she has a family that is more traditional. This was also the relationship between the mother and her son and the nephews, because I've seen this when we were together—my partner's mother would produce a special plate of food for her son or one of the nephews, while the others ate the [everyday] food she had prepared.”

Giovana is not conflicted because she is struggling for the emotional currency that lavish food provides; she is a straightforward person, seemingly confident in her daughter's affections. Rather she struggles with the health aspects—namely, obesity, which Giovanna sees as a natural outcome of her in-laws' eating habits. Giovanna put it this way: “Food is very important in Vittoria's grandmother's family because . . . for example, Vittoria's aunt is really fat. She is obese. And she was like this since she was very young. So my ex-mother-in-law had some responsibility for this. I don't know exactly how it happened, but I heard the mother saying to the daughter: ‘When you were a child you were so hungry! You always wanted to eat.’ And this sounds a bit strange to me, because if you have a daughter who is eight years old, ten years old, you can't allow her to always be hungry! You stop it! You say, ‘Okay, for now it's enough! Let's stop it here!’ And sometimes I talk to Vittoria's grandmother, and she says: ‘Oh, I prepared the meatballs that Vittoria loves, and she ate twenty!’ And I'm on the phone, shocked. And I cannot say anything, of course; it becomes difficult. But it seems that she, the grandmother, cannot control herself. The granddaughter wants the food, and she gives it, and she's happy because the granddaughter likes her food.”

I ask if it is a way of gaining the affections of her granddaughter. Giovanna answers, “Yes, in the end it is a way to get power, because you affect the life of the person.”

I was dining with Nicoletta and her husband Roberto, a couple about thirty-five years old who had a two-year-old son, Giacomo. They were a happy and egalitarian family; the child did not disrupt us at dinner in a *trattoria*, and the father took responsibility for the son at the table. They described how they shared responsibilities for several aspects of family life. Yet when Nicoletta expressed her thoughts on food and mothering, she sounded typically Italian: “I love the relationship with Giacomo. But when he does not eat I am very sad. I understand that maybe he is sick; I want to know, what's wrong? When I understand what is wrong I fix it.”

The relationship between the mother and child changes as both of them age. But it seems that mothers in Italy compete with their daughters as they mature and as a result they do not want to give away their secrets of the kitchen. The closeness of family life increases this friction, compounded by in-laws. The mother-in-law traditionally controlled the daughter-in-law; the son in this in-

stance must maintain relationships with both his mother and his dominated wife, and the daughter must learn the secret and powerful food knowledge on her own.

THE WIFE'S PERSPECTIVE

Every husband has been his mother's son. When a man marries, he establishes a relationship with his wife that draws upon that relationship with his mother. In earlier times the daughter moved into her husband's family and took a secondary role to her mother-in-law. In contemporary Italy, the high cost of housing, as well as cultural factors, typically leads men to live at home until they marry. As a result, the contemporary Italian husband, as was the case with the historical Italian husband, has seldom learned gender independence prior to marriage.

For some women the competition with the mother-in-law is never resolved. This is especially the case when her new husband retains his emotional connection to his mother, who continues to shower him with affection through food. Giovanna told us, "In my case the wife (me), for whom food is not a central life theme, was not able to (*and did not want to*) reproduce a relationship in which the husband was doted upon around food. His only relationship with women had been with his mother, and he preferred dependence and its rewards to an egalitarian relationship in which food was prepared collectively."

Did marrying a man with this relationship with his mother create an expectation of a similar relationship?

Giovanna answers, "Well, in a way it did. I must say that one of the problems was that I couldn't achieve the same level of his mother in respect to food. I never could. But I never tried to be like that; it was not important for me, and this probably saved me. But in his mind, anyway, this was a problem. It wasn't a problem for me not to be able to compete with the mother, but for him probably this was a problem. Because I wasn't so . . . *attentive* . . . I didn't ask him 'What do you want . . . ?' I didn't have this 'lovely way' of giving food, letting him decide what to eat, . . . and asking him when I serve it 'Is it okay . . . is it okay . . . ?' My way is much simpler: maybe just cooking—'Are you hungry? What do we have tonight? . . . OK, let's make a dish of pasta.' This was a problem for him, not really for me, because as I said, this was not one of my goals! It was not my way to relate to my partner."

There are, however, several variations on this theme. Giovanna's mother was not, in her terms, a "great cook," and her father is "very easy; he likes good food, but he's the kind of person who eats because he's hungry. As I am." So food was, in Giovanna's life, a practical concern—appreciated and done well but not dominant; "Everything is okay." Or, better, "Everything is good." Giovanna says, "My father is the common type who never cooks. If he's alone

for some reason and no one can cook for him, he goes out. He cannot cook even an egg. Not because he's not able to do it, because I think everybody's able to do it. But because for him it's impossible to consider going into the kitchen, looking for the tools you need for cooking.

"My mother, even if she's not a great cook, at some point decided I had to learn something. She tried to teach me the few things that she knew. But with my brother, she never tried, because she felt it was not important for the son. And this was the same in other things, not only food—even how to wash a shirt, how to make the laundry work! Or how to iron. All these typical things that have to be done, the daughter should know; the son should not."

"So if you have the expectation of having an equal relationship with your mate," I ask, "do you have to overcome this?"

Giovanna answers, "Nowadays I'm happy to find a man that knows how to do these things and will do them! My brother is the kind of man who does not! And he had to find a woman who is happy to do these things for him. In my case I'm very happy now to have a partner who cooks because he likes to; he knows how to do the laundry, and he does; he knows how to iron, and he does. Also he is a person who lived alone for many years, so anyway he had to do it. My brother went from my parents' house to a house with his woman. He did spend some time alone, but he was bringing things to my mother to wash or going for lunch at my parents' house. So I don't think this special relationship between my mother and my brother was good for him."

Giovanna says her mother has a firm sense of "the things women should do"—not only cooking but washing, ironing, cleaning, and managing the shared space. It is, Giovanna says, still typical in Italy—perhaps less dominant now but still very common. When you meet a man from the other side of the cultural divide, you say, "'Okay, your mother has been very good! Because she wanted you to learn . . .'"

ALTERNATIVE VISIONS

Not all mothers and daughters experience the tension described above. Chiara, for example, regularly cooked with her mother at the vineyard. Clearly they enjoyed each other's company and shared the kitchen and the menu with pleasure, and they cooked excellent food together.

Several women we interviewed had had to resolve their attitudes and behavior toward cooking (as well as other domestic responsibilities) when countercultural politics dominated their lives. Some, including Patrizia, said that it was precisely to liberate them from those tasks that their mothers had not taught them to cook. Patrizia said that when she got married in 1974 (she divorced shortly after) she was not able to cook, but she does not believe it was not because her mother had excluded her from knowledge to diminish her power. Her mother

had said, “‘You’ll have to cook for all your life, so now you have other things to do: so study and enjoy!’ And I began to cook, experimenting and trying to remember what I had seen at home or asking my mother her recipes.”

Clara, referring to her politically active young adulthood, said that she cooked little because her family often ate out. But she tells us, “I never had a real love for cooking, because my mother was a person who said: ‘People invented a lot of things—why has no one invented a pill as a substitute for the meal?’ And still I don’t love to cook. And in that period we had other things in mind. Our vital energies were focused on other things. Food was secondary.”

Finally, in several families the mothers clearly took pleasure in teaching their sons or daughters the arts of the kitchen and the management of food in social life. In these accounts (which we revisit in the discussion on the divisions of labor in food production), food is not a currency of power but a demonstration of the mother’s self-confident re-creation of herself. Perhaps the best example was Maria, who is mother of two sons in their twenties. Maria calls them “good sports; they don’t have problems with it and they cook very well, when they try. Sometimes when we are in Mantova they do some big dinners, and I notice it because I find a piece of broken glass somewhere. And I ask: ‘Did people come?’—‘Ah, yes, there were twelve of us.’”

Maria describes her son Matteo’s preparation of a birthday feast for his brother, complete with a written menu. She tells us how they shadow her in the kitchen when she cooks for guests; Matteo helped her when she hosted a dinner for “the three stars of Mantova”—famous regional chefs—“and was proud of his mom’s success.” Maria smiles when she quotes her son: “My mom is a very good cook.” She is proud of her son; guests told her that “the dinner prepared by Matteo was very good. And he took care to combine the wines with the food; they learned this from their dad.”

The organization of food in the family is more complex in gay relationships because few include children and because there is not a gender-based blueprint to define the partners’ roles in the kitchen.⁸⁰ In the two gay families we studied, each partner developed a role that suited them personally. Both couples were experimenters in a society where gender roles are very strict. The men were interested in domestic chores and cooking, and the women had less pronounced interests in those areas. Similarly, there were no preexisting definitions as to who would have the responsibility for defining the menu and the power that brought, nor were they struggling to gain or maintain power over children through food.

Marina created her kitchen skills out of a vacuum, because she came from a family where “nobody cooked.” Daniela told us that throughout her early life, until she left home at age seventeen, she ate one dish of pasta and a grilled steak daily, “always, without any imagination.” Her personal liberation included



The alternative vision: Chiara and Roberta in the kitchen, a great partnership.



discovering outstanding food. She says she “ran wild shopping and preparing vegetables!” She found that she was capable, inventive, and skilled at interpreting recipes in her new cookbooks.

Bassano came to Bologna fifteen years ago to live with Giorgio. Giorgio had a traditional orientation to food, nourished by both his grandmother and his mother. Food was important; the family cooked every day. On Saturday and Sunday they had the “classic midday dinner, “with *tagliatelle*, cutlets, and chips.” His first job was as a pastry cook, and there he discovered his passion for cooking. Bassano, the dour partner, interjected, “In fact, tonight he said to me: ‘I should continue doing the cooking!’”

“When I came here to live with him,” Bassano continues, “of course I was asking him if he had some doubts. And since I have a good memory, I remembered all the steps my mother did as she cooked, so I made all the dishes as my mother did.” Giorgio offers an interpretation that may not square exactly with Bassano’s version. “Fifteen years ago,” he tells us, “when he came here, he could cook not even a steak.”

Bassano doesn’t disagree. “It was because my mother did not want me to cook, because it is not a thing for men. But I always watched her while she was cooking, so I memorized her procedures. And when I tried to do the same things, I succeeded.” As a result they have organized a family with a division of labor that suits them both.

On this note, we move to the details of labor. Who does what in the imagining and realization of the Italian family meal? And how are these social roles established and contested?



Patti in her kitchen, which I enter cautiously.

Labor

WE HAVE STUDIED ITALIAN FOOD AS A CURRENCY OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP and as a means through which women claim power in the family. But for these things to be realized, someone has to do the work. It has to be given a name (*shopping, cooking, cleaning* are easy, but what about imagining a dinner or taking responsibility for its execution?), and the jobs have to be assigned and carried out. In most societies the division of family labor falls along gender lines and is hardly negotiated beyond that. What is the pattern in Italy, and how is it changing? As it turns out, there is a great deal of scholarship on this question, much of it in Italy.

Several statistics catch our attention: At the beginning of the era of post-World War II prosperity there were few women in the labor force, but by 1991 almost 40 percent of the labor force was female.¹ The average age at which women gave birth changed from just under twenty-five in 1972 to just under thirty in 1990.² We recall the low fertility rates of Italian families (the lowest in Europe, at well under the replacement level of 2.2 children per family) with Bologna, the site of our study, at the astonishingly low rate of 1.2 children per family, lowest of any city in the world.³ To summarize: women have entered the labor force; they are giving birth to fewer children and at a later stage of their lives. Have these trends liberated women from the traditional, gender-based family roles? And have these social trends given rise to the involvement of Italian men in domestic work—in our case, the work surrounding getting food to the table?

These questions preoccupied Italian sociologists long before they were raised in the United States or the rest of Europe. It was the Italian sociologist Laura Balbo who, in 1978, first named *la doppia presenza* (the double presence) of women in the family and work worlds in changing Italy.⁴ This concept became

the foundation of much subsequent feminist scholarship in Italy and elsewhere and remains the starting point for contemporary family research in Italy.

The “double presence” is a recognition that women retained domestic duties when they entered the labor force (what in 1988 the American sociologists Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung termed “the second shift”⁵). *La doppia presenza* means more than working two jobs, for it includes the responsibility for imagining and overseeing the work that ran the household. Men may have helped in the housework, but because the management of the home and all the energies and responsibilities it entailed remained the wife’s responsibility, that help was superficial.

The double presence lived in the minds of both men and women. Men thought they were taking on a meaningful role by doing a few more household tasks, but they still expected their wives to create and maintain a home in which they were fed, comforted, and cared for. When children entered the family, the father might be more involved in child care, but the real work of nourishing the child emotionally and physically fell to the mother. Thus it would be logical that Italian women’s entry into the workforce would have the effect of lessening the number of children they would bear.

All post–World War II industrial democracies have faced similar challenges to traditional family life when women entered the labor force. For example, Marjorie DeVault’s study of family labor in Chicago explores the American version of the “double presence.” DeVault begins with the question of why women accept housework as their natural duty. Is it due to “deeply rooted moral or psychological predispositions”? Or are women a subordinate class that must “exchange caring for material support”? DeVault’s view is that women “feed the family” not because it is their nature to do so, nor because they are coerced to do so, but because they internalize identities connected to feminized social roles in the family. In DeVault’s words, they are “participating in prevailing relations of inequality” by assuming the role of caregiver and food provider. Her work shows how women are recruited, no matter their psychological or emotional predispositions, into “participation in social relations that produce their subordination.”⁶

There are two important recent studies of Italian women’s roles in feeding the family physically and emotionally. The first is Carole Counihan’s ethnography of food and family in Tuscany, where she was herself a member of a household for several years. Her subjects range from those born in the 1920s to the youngest born in the 1960s to early 1970s. Her study is far ranging, offering a history of Tuscan food traditions and evolving family dynamics through the decades of her subjects’ lives, and her conclusions were largely consistent with Balbo’s and DeVault’s. She quotes sixty-six-year-old Elena:

Most Italian men don't do anything around the house. If a woman is a housewife and works only at home, everything is fine, but if she has a job outside the home, I don't know how she can do it. Here the men are not content to eat a sandwich at lunch. They want a first course, they want a second course, vegetables, and then maybe even a dessert. They want all this, twice a day. For working women, the situation is tragic. . . . They have to work in the house when they get home and do what they can. They have to get lunch ready for the next day after dinner. They never have any peace, understand?⁷

Counihan's conclusions resemble DeVault's: "A cultural ideology of sacrifice defined [Florentine] women through self-abnegation and contributed to affirming children's and men's rights to service. It also set up an impossible impasse for the women and the men of the younger generation. They believed in equality in principle, but found it difficult to achieve in practice, because of the persistent ideology of female responsibility and sacrifice."⁸

To see whether things have changed since her work was published, we turn to Italian sociologists Franca Bimbi and Grazia Castellano, who recently examined the beliefs and practices of young families with children in four towns in Emilia-Romagna.⁹ Bimbi and Castellano found a strong ideological commitment to equality in domestic roles in the nearly fifty families they studied, but a consistent inability to achieve them. The families, by and large, wanted to escape the authoritarian and patriarchal roles of their fathers and the subordinate roles of their mothers but found this to impossible to do. The researchers reasoned that this was due to the lack of role models for young fathers and a internalized "double presence" mindset on the part of the young mothers. The husbands and wives made decisions together, and the men played with children more their fathers had. But wives/mothers excluded their husbands from the kitchen, perhaps unwilling to give up a source of their social power in the family and not ready to accept the quality of work they expected from their mates. They formed "implicit pacts," which they never discussed, to retain the old system. These conclusions were consistent with research on Italian families compiled by Italian sociologist Chiara Saraceno in the 1990s.¹⁰

Do these patterns describe the people we studied? We offer a resounding yes, at least on one subject. Women, liberated or not, retain control of the kitchen and for reasons similar to those stated by prior Italian researchers. But in other ways our conclusions differ, which may be due to the fact that aside from Chiara and Giovanna, none of the people we studied have young children. Rather than comparing to the contemporary Italian investigations (which tend to focus on young families with children), our study takes the question to a different generation in a different phase of life. From that perspective our findings can be summarized thus:

- The tasks that run the family food system include imagining menus, procuring and making food, and cleaning up after eating. Men are assigned and take responsibility for a few niches in the division of labor that runs this system, but very few.
- Women appear to accept their roles as an unquestioned aspect of Italian womanhood. Voices of protest, at least among those we studied, are few. Attitudes vary among the women of different class backgrounds, ages, and levels of interest in cooking, but not to a significant degree. In the background is the particularly Italian version of feminism that identifies power and prestige with the caring role (in particular, around food tasks), which we have previously described.
- The gay couples we interviewed taught us the possibility of nongendered divisions of labor. They both created quintessentially Italian families, but from new blueprints.

WOMEN'S AND MEN'S ATTITUDES

We begin by examining men and women's attitudes toward domestic labor. Patrizia says that this is not a matter of simply sharing work; it is a matter of sharing the responsibility for the work: "‘Help’ means that if you ask your husband to go to the supermarket you have to tell him exactly what to buy. The organization of the homework is, in Italy, on the shoulders of the women. The men can help, but the mind work, and most physical work, remains the women's responsibility. It seems almost that the women resist changing this, because maybe they gain a kind of power from these arrangements. For example, one of the themes that comes out from this research is ‘Oh yes, he can do it, but when he works in the kitchen it is a disaster. He makes everything dirty. He puts in too much oil . . . I can do better.’ This is the women's resistance, difficult to explain. For example, my mother didn't teach my brother—nothing. Other men's mothers I know are all the same. When the men are able to cook, it is because they decided to learn. Even if the mother didn't teach the daughter formally, she was helping; she was watching, tasting. ‘Please, grind the parmesan . . .’ The idea was that the daughter, in the past, had to learn to serve her future husband. That was not taught directly; but it was understood. And I am speaking of professional, educated families."

I asked Andrea and Silvia whether husbands and wives should share the work of the kitchen. Andrea at first agrees: "Yeah. But she's right. Ninety-nine and nine-tenths of the hard work is hers."

Silvia offers, "Once I discovered that he was able to cook. But he doesn't really want to do the preparation by himself."

Then, I ask, isn't true that their division of labor is based on gender?

Andrea is adamant, "No, absolutely not!"

I ask them to explain.

"No problem at all," Andrea says. "We are kidding, of course. I am able to

cook. She cooks better than I do, but I am able to prepare a pasta dish, a meat dish. I can do a basic dish.”

“Can you make *ragù*?” I ask, and Andrea tells me that he *could* make it but it would take six hours rather than three, “and of course I would make a mess in the kitchen. So if you don’t mind seeing the destruction of our kitchen, the result would be a nice *ragù*. So in three hours, she would make a good *ragù*, and the kitchen would be clean. In six hours, I could make a good *ragù*, but the kitchen would be in a mess. I don’t even help her prepare the table, the dishes, the forks, cutlery, and all. She doesn’t insist, because we have a very nice set of dishes and she doesn’t trust me to touch them. So she’s not too bothered that I don’t prepare the table. But I’m overwhelmed by my job, I work very hard, and so even if I am alone, I don’t cook for myself.”

The women we interviewed also often expressed an unconscious condescension toward their male mates, which corresponded with men’s willingness to be treated almost as children when it came to food preparation or kitchen work in general.

Patrizia asks Side, “Is Marco able to cook?”

“Yes, he manages, honestly. He is specialist in grating the *parmigiano*. I give him directions and he helps me. Like today, for example: We have some rice, left over from yesterday. So when I’m about to arrive to home, I call him and he adds some water and warms it.”

And Patrizia asks Maria: “Who cleans up the table?”

“Everybody.”

“The head of the family too?”

“Yes,” Maria says, “Costantino too, he too is able to take off the tablecloth.”

For most couples, the gender roles go unquestioned. Patrizia reflected at the end of an interview with Lucia, “You plan, you cook, you go shopping.”

She answered, “Yes, all the things women do.”

And Maria said, “Everybody helps a little bit when there is just the family, I mean, only Costantino remains sitting always . . .”

How are these matters handled in couples where there are no gender differences?

Patrizia asks Marina and Dani, Giorgio and Bassano, “My question is whether the food cultures of your families have male and female roles.”

Giorgio says, “It is pragmatic. I enjoy staying home to cook. Bassano does not have as much time.”

“Is it correct to say that in gay relationships there is more equality regarding the work surrounding food?”

Dani and Marina and Bassano and Giorgio say in unison: “Corretto! Corretto!”

We now look in detail at the various tasks involved with creating and maintaining the family food worlds. Not all tasks are equally difficult, nor are all equally valued and rewarded. The Italian version of the double presence offers some surprises.

PLANNING

Someone has to decide: what will we eat, and who will buy and cook it? It is this responsibility that Patrizia says best represents the “double presence” in Italian women’s lives: responsibility for the organization of the meal, deciding what to eat, shopping, cooking, and cleaning up.

In some circumstances, however, men are involved in planning. Maria provides an example. She is discussing how she and Costantino prepare their large dinner parties, which they do as many as twenty times a year.

Patrizia asks: “When you have guests, how does Costantino participate in the decisions regarding the menu?”

“He decides,” Maria says; “he identifies the main directions of the meal, and then I tell him if I am or I’m not able to do it, because sometimes he proposes recipes that—it’s not a matter of being able to do them, it’s a matter of having the time to do them, and I can’t prepare the food two days before. Food, in my view, is generally best if it is prepared at the moment. So if the dinner will be on the weekend, we start discussing the menu at the beginning of the week. Sometimes I make some small tests during the week to see if I can do it.

“Costantino’s ideas contribute to the aesthetics of the dinner,” Maria continues, “if not to the content. But perhaps he contributes, at least theoretically, to the content. I learn a lot from the gastronomic tours we often do. We visit restaurants, and I try to copy some recipes, maybe the simplest ones, but I modify something, because I don’t like just to copy; I put something personal in. And I must say that sometimes I succeed.”

For day-to-day routines it is also Costantino who “is the mind, the theoretician. He says, ‘I’d like this, or that.’ Or, for example, the other day he said, ‘Could you cook some beans for tonight?’ The beans have to be soaked for several hours, so I said, ‘I’ll prepare them tomorrow.’ Sometimes he expresses these wishes.”

Their sons also have a part in the decisions, "They don't ask for meals, but sometimes they say, 'This is good, but don't make it anymore.' And then I understand . . . Sometimes I try some experiments and they say, 'Good, but don't make it anymore.' Both my sons notice if I have forgotten to put in a pinch of oregano, for example, in a dish they ate some time ago; they tell me."

Maria is an excellent cook and certainly does not require guidance in meal planning. That Costantino is the "theoretician" is either an example of cooperative work or the imposition of the male into the most creative aspects of a work world that is otherwise created, staffed, and fulfilled almost entirely by the family's female side.

Lucia and Franco work together organizing dinner parties, and Lucia takes direction from family members for daily menus, but she retains control. We ask, "Is there anybody who orders something, like 'Tomorrow I would like . . . '?" Lucia answers, "Yes, everybody. 'Mom, I'd like to eat this' . . . 'Why don't you make that?' Yes, yes, there is always somebody who has some requests." Franco agrees, "Always!"

This was, in general, the pattern we observed. Families made suggestions and sometimes criticized choices the mother made, but she created the day-to-day menu. The question of who was responsible did not even make a great deal of sense in many families; this was what was expected. It was internalized as the woman's responsibility, and as such it represented the "double presence" that Italian women are responsible for.

SHOPPING

Shopping involves marshaling the family resources to provision the family. It includes decisions to spend family resources (in the recent past, food was the single largest family expenditure) to finance what is arguably the most valued family activity. From this perspective, shopping is more than a chore; it is playing out a cultural script that confers social power. This was especially the case of poor Italians of the past, who had scarce lire to supplement what they grew or produced themselves. My friend Giosafat, a man my age who grew up poor in Naples, said it was customary for husbands to turn over their scant earnings to their wives, who then were responsible to somehow create a week of meals for the entire family. That they could do so was, he said, "a miracle."

Our subjects all earn enough to shop without a constant preoccupation with price. Shopping, as well, can be a pleasure. In Bologna, I think of it as a feast of sights, sounds, smells, and interactions. The indoor market of Via Ugo Bassi in the center city has about perhaps a hundred stalls selling fresh vegetables, fruits, candies, and meat. It is a sensory overload, but it is practical, too. The products

and prices change daily as new foods are brought to market, so it is possible to plan a meal on the basis of what looks especially good on a particular day.

On the other side of the central plaza (Piazza Maggiore) are small streets with specialty shops; fish, regional produce, regional pastas, cheeses. They are also one delight after another, and when you tire from shopping, there are several tiny bars awaiting your presence for a coffee or glass of wine. The proprietors make a point of remembering you, and that helps transform a chore into a pleasure.

Shopping in those stores is an outing into a pedestrian-friendly city, but I am guilty of idealizing it. It is hard work to lug groceries around, no matter how appealing the place you have shopped or the food you have purchased, and these tasks become more difficult as you age. Since many people we spoke to shop almost every day, this is no little thing.

There are stores that are similar to American convenience stores (one located a half a block from Patrizia's), but they are expensive and the quality is poor. I expect that they make most of their profits on bottled water, soft drinks, and single bottles of beer sold to tourists and young people. There are also supermarkets, where Italian women increasingly shop,¹¹ often for several days' worth of meals. I observed and noted shopping patterns in the PAM supermarket near Patrizia's flat: almost all the shoppers were women, and not uncommonly they were buying a hundred euros' worth of food. These supermarkets feature fresh fruit and vegetables, and the quality is excellent, at least to an American shopper. Again, since these supermarkets are inside the city, where parking is very hard to find, shoppers have to transport their groceries via bus or foot to their homes.

ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY

Food plays a central role in the lives of Maria and Costantino; they spend a great deal of their leisure time planning and realizing elaborate meals. Maria plans the shopping, but often it is carried out by Costantino. In fact, Maria says that Costantino is "much better than me. He shops with the list written by me, and he never buys soaps—that is my work. He is much better food shopping because he spends half a day buying the food."

Maria uses the supermarket "for almost everything. Now we are very satisfied with the Esselunga [a national chain] market. But when I'm looking for particular things, I go to a small shop. If I have to buy fish, I go downtown."

Is going to the supermarket always Costantino's task?

Maria answers, "No, I usually go for everyday shopping. And I am also attracted by the things I see. The other day I saw some wonderful breasts of duck and then I bought them."

Maria says she enjoys shopping. "The problem is," she says, "I have to give myself some limits. I like it, I like it. I usually go during the dead hours, because the crowds irritate me and I like to stop in front of the food, to read, to decide between this or that. When Costantino and I go shopping together, we really spend half a day there."

"You mean," Patrizia says, "that instead of going to the cinema, you go to the supermarket?"

"Yes, really. Costantino is very good, because he reads everything, he knows the expiration dates. When I could not go shopping because of health problems, he shopped for a half a day to buy three or four things. And then he came back home with a lot of delicious things."

Side cooks traditional Bolognese fare, repeating a relatively short list of recipes. For her and Marco, provisioning is routine, and Marco has a role:

Patrizia asks, "Who does the shopping?" Side answers, "Marco and I, together. Once a week we go to the Coop [supermarket] for the big shopping. And then I pick up the bread and other few things near home, where they also take your blood [i.e., overcharge]."

"Who decides what to buy?"

"Me," Side says, "but Marco helps. He finds the olive oil, pasta, rice, sugar."

Carlo and Barbara shop together, but not always harmoniously. Barbara works in a butcher shop, which is also a food shop, and she buys much of their food there. Together they shop at the supermarket, every ten days on average. They do not plan menus; they improvise their meals, except for breakfast. Their problem is buying on impulse. We ask, "And when you are in the supermarket and see something you did not think about buying but it attracts you, do you buy it?" Barbara answers, "All the time," and Carlo agrees. Barbara says they are "affected with a disease regarding this. We discussed this subject this afternoon; we have to cut down these expenses." Carlo says, "Even if you take just three beers, one bottle of Coca-Cola, two books, four juices instead of one, the expenses mount up."

They are stressed over the uncontrolled expenses. Barbara says, "Yes, you come into the market, you plan to buy the stuff you need and then you take three times as much. 'Don't you want to buy that soap in special offer?' So we always leave with three times more than we anticipated." Carlo interjects, "At home, we have soaps for eight families, because *she* . . ." and Barbara interrupts, ". . . also juices for eight families, because *he* . . ."

Carlo wants their shopping to be more systematic, and for this reason he likes to shop alone. "And," he says, "I like it more because when I am with her, as soon as I put my hand on a shelf: 'What fucking thing are you buying?' And then my hand comes back [he laughs]. Do you know what bothers me more



Fish shop, Bologna, central city

when I go shopping with her? She does not have any method. She has four things to find and she goes back and forth one hundred times. I am fanatical about going through all the aisles in a systematic way, and I look at everything, so I never forget anything.”

Giorgio and Bassano and Dani and Marina have no template for dividing up shopping; personal preference guides who does what. Dani tells us that they go to the supermarkets “when we have nothing to buy” (all four laugh; clearly this is a common theme). “We like it very much. We look at all the food specialties, including those we’ll never buy. We love the ritual of shopping.” She adds, “We usually go to shopping together, always.”

Patrizia, “Always together?”

“Yes,” Marina answers, “the two hands on the cart.”

Bassano says that he and Giorgio would like to be like Mari and Daniela. “For me going shopping should be a pleasant thing, I don’t have to be in a hurry, On the contrary, going with Giorgio is like going with the sergeant of



A small shop in Bologna

a barracks. 'Take this, take that, get out, come on, it is late.' So it is better to go separately."

Giorgio does not disagree. "When I go to shopping, I run through all the shelves, I take the stuff and go to the cash register, and it's finished. I hate it; I go only because it is necessary."

Bassano and Giorgio use the supermarket for "big shopping" but buy special foods in the traditional shops. Giorgio says that, for example, "the dinner you just ate came from traditional shops." For Dani and Marina, it is only the quality of bread that draws them to the small shops, and neither of them eat much of it. They journey to the bakery when there are guests or when a special menu calls for bread.

SHOPPING SOCIALLY

Small food shops create a social world in which mostly women participate. That world includes the pleasure of relationships with strangers who, over the years, one comes to know in a limited yet deep way. The second aspect of the social world is the trust that develops between buyer and seller. Because one is dealing with an individual rather than an organization, the implied pact between buyer and seller guarantees certain levels of quality.

Maria buys particular foods in the small shops, but mostly in Mantova, where she still has a home. There she has her butcher, greengrocer, and confectioner. In those shops there is a relationship between buyer and seller that she can-

not establish in Bologna, where her contacts are more sporadic. Patrizia asks, "So in Mantova you don't read the label, you trust the seller?" Maria answers, "Yes, sure."

Is going to these shops also an opportunity to chat? "Yes," she answers. "They ask me about Bologna, I ask them the latest gossip from Mantova . . . It's a cultural exchange!"

Patrizia asked Side, who has lived in the same home and neighborhood her entire adult life: "You said that the shops near home are expensive. Do you shop there because you go to chat with the store owners, because you know each other?"

Side answers, "Yes, it is more familiar than the supermarket. But the quality is also better. I bought some small artichokes to preserve in oil; I paid twenty-four euros to make three pots. There is a big difference! They cost a lot, because twenty-four euros, and the oil, the lemon, the vinegar, and the time you spend. But there is a big difference in the result!" With the small shop owners, she says, "one talks about this and that; there is more familiarity."

Lucia has shopped in the indoor market in the center of Bologna for thirty years "so there are three or four shops where I'm *at home*. I stop to chat, and the relationship is almost friendly."

"And you trust them to give you good food?"

Lucia answers, "Yes, because I go always to the same places."

However, not all the relationships shoppers have with sellers are harmonious. We ask Giorgio and Bassano whether they seek out the small shops for their social character, and Bassano answers, "Giorgio doesn't!" Giorgio adds, "I can't stand the milkman. I don't like the greengrocer. The butcher is a gossip. I go there only because I need something."

COOKING

There has been much commentary on the "decline of the meal" in the United States and elsewhere. Peter Atkins and Ian Bowler note that in England "traditional cooking skills have often been substituted by technological innovations such as microwave ovens. . . . The average cooking time of a main meal in 1934 was 2.5 hours but this has been reduced now to only 15 minutes."¹² They also cite a study of "Newcastle families, which found that 94% of meals now take less than 10 minutes of preparation, and 51% no time at all. Only 7% take more than 20 minutes of cooking time. Such trends are part of the explosive growth of sales in ready-to-eat meals."¹³ While our point is not to compare Italian families with other European or American families, it has become nearly a truism to lament, in much of the postindustrialized world, the end of the "homecooked" (i.e., not microwavable or premanufactured) family meal—that

is, an event where the family gathers to eat food prepared from basic materials in an artful way.

Has this change come to Italy, and how has it influenced gender roles in the family?

To cook raw ingredients, the typical Italian method, takes a great deal of time. That meant one thing when women were not in the labor force but means quite another when most are. Still, we were surprised to learn the number of hours that normal Italians devote to food preparation and their attitude toward it. When Italians have less time, they make a simpler dish; they do not put a frozen dinner into a microwave. Our subjects spent from one hour a day on food preparation (Barbara) to three or more (several women):

For example, Side said she cooks, “on average, two or three hours a day. I try to organize my work to have the sauce for pasta ready when I come back home at noon. So I prepare it the afternoon before or early in the morning. Yes, two or three hours. Because you have to understand, vegetables take a lot of time, and I also make some *ciambella* [a simple cake] for the breakfast, because we don’t buy anything.”

Maria tells us: “Some considerable time is spent cooking, because if I come back home late, if I have a meeting after five p.m., after school, then I would have worked in the kitchen for two hours in the morning to prepare the dinner ahead of time.” Maria “never quantifies the time in the kitchen, for I like to stay there very much . . . and in fact, I decided on the design and the furnishing of the kitchen myself; I only did this regarding this room within the house, to feel good in the kitchen. Because I like it very much. For me, to have the passion to do it, that’s a good start.”

And we ask Lucia: “How much time do you spend everyday, on average?”

“With the vegetables,” she replies, “and I’m telling the truth, sometimes I stay half a day in the kitchen and I prepare a lot of things, so if on the other days I have some engagements I always have something ready. Anyway, I think I spend a couple of hours on average.”

When Italians need fast food, when they have come home late and are exhausted or when plans have changed, they eat food they can prepare quickly. Maria describes her fast pasta with a dash of butter and *parmigiano*; others put together a salad from the fresh produce with which their refrigerators are seemingly always stocked. Lucia described a typical solution: “The other night we were alone, and we came back home very late. Then I said, ‘There is nothing to eat—do I make a soup?’ And Franco said: ‘No soup, let’s eat what is in the fridge!’ So we took the cheese, the salami, the dried tomatoes, the olives, raw fennel, and we could not stop eating!”

Heterosexual families defined cooking as women’s work. The kitchen was their universe, and they protected it with gusto. It was the same in nearly all

of our families. For example, Patrizia asks Maria, "So you always cook, sometimes your sons help you, but Costantino never sets foot in the kitchen?" She answers, "Absolutely."

She asks Lucia, "Do only you cook?"

"Yes, only I." Franco adds, "Even more, if we had to quantify!"

Patrizia asks Barbara, "Who prepares the dinner?" Barbara answers, "Usually it is me."

Carlo adds, "For dinner, Barbara." But Carlo, as we later note, often cooks his own lunch, making pasta, which Barbara finds too involving at midday.

Patrizia asks Cristina, "And you cook?" She replies, "Yes, I like very much to cook."

"Is Sandro able to cook?"

"He is, but he does not like it. Instead I love to cook, so I do it."

Silvia *due* told us, almost apologetically, "My husband is very good at many aspects of life, very good at many, many things. He eats the food, but he doesn't prepare food, and so I am alone to prepare the food." This was always the case. In fact I pride myself on being a good cook, and one who cleans up his messes and doesn't break dishes, but I practically have to beg my way into Patrizia's kitchen, and while I'm cooking she is almost glowering in a nearby room.

There are no studies of gay family life in Italy, and so we turn to the previously cited American study of lesbian family life. Christopher Carrington notes that in each couple one individual takes on the "empathetic activity" of creating meals that the other partner will enjoy and find nutritionally acceptable.¹⁴ Most couples said they wanted to "remain beautiful," in this case identified as thin, and this radically influenced choice of menus and meals. Given the breadth of the study (more than fifty families interviewed), there was great class variation, which influenced how often dinner parties were planned and executed. Carrington concludes: "We have seen that feeding work within lesbian families is neither inconsequential nor simple. Strangely, much conversation and academic analysis concerning feeding work reduces the complexity of the enterprise, minimizes its significance, and legitimates the view held by many participants that they don't really do very much feeding work—a view held by those who do it as well as by those who don't."¹⁵

Carrington surmises that some partners are driven by the desire to serve the other, or the time spent on food may be related to the precariousness of the relationship due to "lack of social, political and economic resources." They need to pull together to survive. Gay families at the higher end of the class spectrum prepare meals "teeming with creativity, quality, symbolic meaning, and nutritional content."¹⁶ For those less well off, the domestic work surrounding feeding is "routine, fatiguing, nutritionally compromised, and symbolically

arid,” contributing little to creation of a family. The lack of a gender blueprint to define roles in provisioning meant that these must be continually negotiated, and this process is often conflictual.

Marina and Dani and Bassano and Giorgio are similar in age, social class background, and cultural orientation. Each couple lives together and shares housing and domestic chores. Both relationships seemed stable and happy. While Italy is not known for its tolerance of homosexuality, it may be that the progressive character of Bologna has made gay life there easier than it is in other regions. We ate dinners with each couple separately and together, and Patrizia and I did interviews at a follow-up dinner, as I distributed the photos I’d made of the previous dinners. Interviewing the two families created a kind of focus group, where their reflections on each other’s family organization stimulated further reflection on their own.

Patrizia began by asking the two couples: “Who cooks?”

Bassano begins, “I cook! Not always—I used to cook until recently, because I came home earlier. Now, since Giorgio sometimes comes back first, he cooks. So the first one coming home cooks.”

“Now I cook every time,” Giorgio disagrees.

“Not always, not every night,” Bassano says, “This week you cooked two times, the other time I cooked.”

Do they ever cook together?

Giorgio answers, “Never! Absolutely never! We could draw knives cooking together!”

Bassano agrees. “If he tells me he is going to cook, I put myself on the sofa! I disappear. We could not stay together in the kitchen, because we would fight. We bother each other.”

Marina says, “It is the same for us too.”

Giorgio says, “The point is, I’m able to cook, he is not.” Everybody laughs, and Bassano concludes, “No, the point is he is the best for elaborate, difficult, and planned dishes. I’m more given to quick dishes, and I’m more creative. So if we have dinner alone it is easier that I cook. Otherwise, if we have guests we decide what to prepare; if it is an elaborate dish, then he cooks.”

Marina and Dani have different food preferences, which requires what they call “double cooking.” Marina says, “Yes, we have separate cooking. Anyway, my special dish is the pizza, is it not true, Dani? So we do separate cooking, in part because Dani has dinner at her mother’s place two times a week, in part because I don’t accept some food Dani eats. My typical dinner is made of steamed vegetables and steamed fish. That is, one vegetable and one protein, or one vegetable and one carbohydrate.”

Dani says, “I never could eat one steamed fish and one steamed vegetable—*oh my God*, what a sadness! Rather I cook for myself a dish of pasta with a

DINNER WITH GIORGIO AND BASSANO



Our first plate consisted of artisan-made pasta, purchased in Rome, made in Naples, in the shape of tiny morels.

The sauce was made from tomatoes, shredded carrot, onions, and hot pepper.

The second plate was a quiche made from spinach, ricotta, and eggs. They made the shell as they make pasta: flour and water.

For a salad we ate *radicchio* (red and white), oil, vinegar, salt.

Dessert was boiled chestnuts that they had preserved in water with sugar, lemon, and orange (Giorgio is spooning out chestnuts in the photo above).

We then ate Giorgio's homemade puffs with cream (he was previously a pastry chef).

Finally, for a third dessert we ate frozen mascarpone tiramisu.

We drank a bottle and a half of red wine with dinner, and for dessert they opened a bottle of Prosecco.



DINNER WITH DANI AND MARINA



We ate the antipasti (pecorino, green olives, tiny sausages) with the first course, which was ready and must be eaten hot (we were late!).

The first plate was risotto with artichoke. (Dani serves the risotto, above.)

The second plate was a quiche made with eggs, parmigiano, artichoke, béchamel (*sformato*).

We then ate a salad consisting of various greens (*valeriana*) and finocchio (*white*). The leaves are buttery in texture. We chose from one of three olive oils (two from Tuscany and one from Puglia) and three vinegars. The first was a common white wine vinegar; the second was a *frutti di bosco*, from the wild fruit, including blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries. The third, balsamic from Modena, carries the aroma of herbs, is aged in wood, and is several years old and expensive. The vinegar is black and thick. Dani and Mari said, "Health is something you can see!"

For dessert we ate pastries from their favorite bakery.



quick tomato sauce. Anyway, eating as she does is intolerable for me.” Marina adds, “In addition, you eat cheese and I don’t.”

Dani agrees, “Yes, I eat cheese and also salami and cold pork meats. Marina does not eat either cheese nor salami, so for me it is perfect to eat *prosciutto* for dinner. Sometimes I eat the dishes she prepares. For example, sometimes she prepares some salad, and I eat it because I really like it. Anyway, usually Marina manages the cooking. I do that when we have guests, then I decide to cook, because I’m definitely a better cook than she [looking at Marina]; yes, it is true!”

“Come on!” Marina adds, then relents: “Okay, Dani is keen on this . . .”

So Dani gets to claim cooking for guests, but not always, Marina says. If it is in “strict observation of the rules, she cooks. If it is a dinner based on vegetables, I cook.”

Patrizia observes, “So you are specialized in different dishes. And it can happen that Marina cooks and Dani unwraps *prosciutto*?”

Marina agrees. “Or she cooks a dish or pasta for herself.”

“Basically,” Dani says, “I prefer more tasty foods”—“and you don’t mind if you eat three proteins,” Marina adds. “Yes, it’s true, I don’t care,” says Dani. “Eating three slices of *prosciutto*, a piece of cheese, and one boiled egg is good for me.”

Bassano and Giorgio, and Dani and Marina, share tasks but do not agree about all aspects of their domestic food worlds. For example, they do not agree about mechanical dishwashers: Dani does not want one but Marina would like one; Bassano distrusts the machine but Giorgio takes dirty dishes downstairs to his mother’s when he feels like it. Both couples have a pragmatic attitude toward dinnerware: they dirty very few dishes, use the same dish for several courses, and wash pots and pans as they are used. As a result the kitchen does not become terribly untidy during the cooking and is left clean and organized when dinner is over. The arrangement seems rational and efficient.

In general the two gay couples we studied integrate food into their lives in a matter-of-fact way, adjusting to each other’s preferences and pleasures. They had different food preferences, styles of shopping, and even attitudes toward cleaning, but their disagreements were gentle. Both couples demonstrated that Italian families are capable of organizing domestic work outside the templates created by gender.

MEN’S CONTRIBUTIONS

What do men do in the Italian kitchens we visited? Generally women dominate the space and assume responsibility for the tasks. In some families this is changing, but when men do clean, they are supervised by the women. In some

interesting exceptions, women are teaching their sons to manage the kitchen and to take responsibility for several aspects of meal preparation.

There was, however, one rule that was never broken: in every home I visited, kitchens are spotless; dishes are washed and put away; the mess made during dinner preparations is cleaned up when the dinner is finished. How, specifically, is this accomplished?

Maria describes both how her sons participate, and she finishes her statement with “Doing these things is my task; I do it without any problem . . .”

Patrizia: “Who washes the dishes?”

Maria: “The dishwasher, and if it is not there I always wash them.”

Patrizia: “The sons?”

Maria: “The sons wash them when they are alone. They never leave anything dirty, either after their dinners or in our vacation houses; they always clean up everything. When we all are at home, doing these things is my task; I do it without any problem, washing dishes does not bother me.”

Lucia and Side describe their system: “My husband and the kids help me in cleaning up, and then I put everything in the dishwasher.”

Patrizia asks Side: “And who washes the dishes?”

Side: “Side, or the machine.”

Barbara and Carlo, a generation younger than most of the families we studied, distributed tasks more equally. Carlo says that either of them sets and clears the table and washes the dishes. Barbara agrees, and she appreciates it: “I hate to take the dishes out of the machine.”

In most families we visited, men have one responsibility in the labor that produces the dinner, which is to choose and buy wine. For Costantino, as we have discussed, wine is a passion that leads him to many parts of Italy. It is not uncommon for Maria and Costantino to visit a particular vineyard in a previously unvisited corner of Italy and return with cases of wine. For other men, buying wine meant choosing among the selection of primarily local wines that fill the shops and supermarkets. Several women said that choosing wine requires a special kind of knowledge that men uniquely possess. Odd as that is, it was a common view. For example, when Patrizia asked Maria who bought the wine, she said, “Just Costantino. . . . He has a great knowledge of the wines.” But Maria wonders whether perhaps her skill is artistic and Costantino’s skill in wine selection is technical: “Yes, the wine is his task. Even if he says I have more taste. He understands if there are defects, but if the wine has a particular flavor, I don’t know, of violet or geranium, I sense it more than he does.”



The son of Patrizia *due* takes over pasta preparation.

Lucia claims ignorance, and Franco claims expertise: “Franco is particularly involved in the decisions regarding the wines, things that I don’t know about.”

Patrizia asks Franco, “You combine the wines with the food?”

Franco answers, “Yes, I pay attention, to get the correct wine. . . . I like it, it is a passion I have.”

There was one area where kitchen task that the men of heterosexual families were responsible for, and oddly enough it resembled men’s common role in the United States—that is, the barbecue. Domenico often managed the open fireplace in the vineyard while Roberta cooked pastas and other foods in the nearby kitchen. Pino is a master of the barbecue, and other men in our study assumed that responsibility as well. Tim Parks noted the same pattern in northeastern Italy, where he lives. It appears to be a cross-cultural universal!

There may be change in the future. Near the end of the study we interviewed a family in their midthirties, Marco and Roberta, who have two young children. Dedicated to gender equality, they share all domestic chores. They both work outside the home, so even ferrying their children from babysitters to preschool is a complicated task. We had eaten with them twice during the study period but did not include them in our formal study simply because it was difficult to arrange interviews. In our shared evenings they both took responsibility for their children, in an easygoing way that busy but flexible parents achieve. Pa-



Russell, married to Silvia, is the only American in our study. He does kitchen work!

trizia asked them whether this was typical of their friends with young children, but they did not know. Certainly a follow-up to Bimbi and Castellano's study of the impact of gender on the assigning and performing of domestic work is called for.

SUMMARY

The people we studied fit into several parts of this social picture. Several women adapted to traditional gender roles and seemed pleased to gain the social power these roles provide. Other women, politically radical in the 1960s, became interested in food later in their lives and have found ways to integrate elements of traditional roles with their feminist consciousness. Gay couples demonstrate that men can and do adapt to the traditionally female roles in the home, yet few if any of the men outside the gay relationships seemed to have any role in the family food world aside from selecting wine, grating cheese, or taking off the tablecloth. Thus Italian women maintain the "double presence" in work and home, and it is likely that if our sample were more focused on young families with children we would have found its tensions more evident. For those we studied, few having children and most being comfortably situated in the middle class, the divisions of food labor in the family produced a harmonious if unequal social existence.

PART TWO



Chiara's sister Rita with a morel harvested from their parents' vineyard. It will find its way into our pasta.

Constructing Food the Italian Way

I WALK FOR SEVERAL HOURS IN HUMID HEAT, PHOTOGRAPHING THE CITY. It is hard work and I deserve a break. Early in the evening I stop at my favorite bar, Enoteca des Arts, on San Felice, near Patrizia's house. I have been there many times before, having been first brought here by Pino a decade ago. It is old and worn, off the beaten track, locals only. I'm drawn to the ambience created by the simple rectangular room, the dark ceiling arched from side to side, mottled browns and yellows. A shelf high on the wall across from the bar is lined with bottles bearing labels faded to a shade of dark yellow that matches the walls.

The proprietor is about my age, with a ponytail halfway down his back. He looks vaguely Native American. "Mi ricordo di te" (I remember you), he says, hand extended. It has been a year since I last visited. "Il bar migliore di Bologna," I say, the best bar in Bologna. This is a city where thousands of bars compete with elegance, funkiness, fakiness—certainly a city of bars, so he seems to take me seriously.

The heat and humidity call for Prosecco, the light Italian champagne from the northeast. He retreats to the corner where there is a glass cabinet with some cheeses and meats. He takes a long loaf, extracts a long knife from a block, and cuts the bread into cross-sections half an inch across. He dribbles on a little oil, spreads a few capers, adds a thin slice of sun-dried tomato and, finally, a very thin slice of parmigiano. He brings me a tray of four slices (one never drinks without eating in Italy, so if you enter a bar and ask for a drink you will generally be served snacks as well). Though I am going for dinner in an hour, I eat two examples of his artistry. He retreats to his corner: slice, slice—*mortadella*, maybe the creamiest meat ever made, paper thin, is folded over warmed bread. That Americans made this meat into "bologna" is beyond a travesty. "Grazie, mille," I say. "É Bologna," he replies. Indeed.

It is time to talk about Italian food itself. The raw materials are available in other parts of the world, but in Italy they are constructed differently, carrying their Italianness in how they are made, used, combined, and defined. We offer sketches of several iconic Italian foods (some specific to Bologna; others not), assembling in the process a simple Italian meal. We move from the most simple foods, those eaten as harvested, to the most complex, which are industrially manufactured. Italians value freshness, simplicity, and quality in their foods, and they especially value their own versions of particular foods (for example, the seven-hundred-year-old methods used to produce *parmigiano reggiano*) that produce distinctive tastes and combine to make particularly Italian dishes and meals. We hope to communicate a sense of those qualities, knowing we cannot do so with words alone.

We are also interested in the social and economic forces that, over the course of history, influence how raw materials become food. This is a political and cultural phenomenon, as well as a simple matter of turning material into edible products. Italian food is produced for Italians, but also for Europeans as part of Italy's participation in the European Union, and indeed for the world. For many reasons, quality being but one, Italian foods have been global commodities that operate as cultural signs as well as products in their own right. We will describe some of the battles that are being waged over who gets to control the symbolic dimension of Italian food as well as the commodities they represent.

But our focus is mostly on food rather than the semiotics of food. As I complete the final revisions of the book, I have just returned from a trip to Rome with twenty-one university students as part of a course on Italian cultural studies. The students were new to Italy, though several were of Italian ancestry; they ate Americanized Italian food at home and were skeptical of the claim that Italian food in Italy could actually be that much different from what they were used to. However, after a three-hour dinner at the Sicilia al Tappo, a Sicilian restaurant in Rome, several announced that they had just consumed "the best meal of my life." With due respect to their Italian American mothers, they had found in Italy a different gastronomical universe. One student later told of us of being invited by her boyfriend to a local Olive Garden restaurant after she returned and of having to force herself to eat what she had enjoyed just two weeks before.

Most people expect such an experience when they go to Italy, and even in a city like Rome, flooded with tourists, most are not disappointed. We shall ask how and why Italian food achieves excellence.

We begin our review with foods harvested from nature and eaten fresh or dried, focusing on wild ingredients for salads and herbs. We then study cultivated vegetables, referencing the tomato, the most important vegetable in Italian cuisine. Our discussion evolves to pasta, a simple food with a complex history of manufacturing techniques, economics, and politics. We then turn to olive oil, an ancient food of many cultures that perhaps reaches its zenith in Italian cuisine. We then study two processes through which food is constructed through human intervention: curing (we study *prosciutto* and *lardo*) and “managed biological transformation,” that is, the creation of cheese from milk. Finally we consider this universe of foods in the context of the new world of manufactured foods, coming even to Italy. Throughout we connect these quintessential Italian foods with political, economic, and historical forces that were part of their construction.

We could have chosen other examples of foods, but our point is not to offer an encyclopedia of Italian tastes.¹ We want to call attention to what is special about Italian food: its roots in ancient practices and processes, an emphasis on quality and freshness, and its cultural power, which reaches from one end of Italy to the other. We consider foods of Emilia-Romagna (*prosciutto* and *parmigiano*) but also foods like pasta found throughout Italy. Our focus is national as well as regional.

So let’s make lunch!

HARVESTING WILD FOODS

We begin by gathering greens for our salad and spices for our sauce. As humans sought foods from the natural world, they picked plants growing around them, learning by trial and error what was poisonous and what was edible. Wild foods eventually had two roles in cuisines: the last chance for starving peasants, who made soups from weeds and thistles, and exquisite flavorings and salads for the plates of the privileged. Sometimes the categories overlap, as Tim Parks, our transplanted Englishman, tells us about his northern Italian neighbors: “The locals have a taste for such rough, bitter salads: leaves with the texture of a cat’s tongue and the taste of herb medicine. Terribly good for her constipation, Lucilla confides. To me it seems the kind of taste one could only develop in the darkest wartime.”²

The use of wild foods distinguishes Italian food historically and today. Recipes recorded in the Middle Ages and Renaissance call for marjoram, mint, rosemary, parsley, sage, dill, basil, bay leaf, catnip, pimpernel, and wild thyme.



We drive through the vineyard in Domenico's 1950s Fiat jeep. In and around the vines are the wild plants his household harvests.

Capatti and Montanari write, "Italian recipe collections reveal an acceptance of nature that was unparalleled elsewhere, since they feature even ingredients such as mushrooms and truffles."³ Ancient Italian medicine identified foods that achieved balance in the body, and herbs, mushrooms, and other naturally occurring plants were raw materials for this science.

So we begin by looking at rural cultures that formed a bridge between the centuries of peasant life and the quickly evolving rural Italy of today. We again call upon Elizabeth Romer, long-time visitor to a small farm in an isolated Tuscan valley. Romer was befriended by Silvana, who almost single-handedly provisioned her family and up to twenty harvest workers in season with food they grew, made, or gathered. Romer writes:

One of [family patriarch] Orlando's favorites is the *luperi*; this is a pretty climbing plant that grows in hedgerows near water. Its top tender leaves and stalk, about the last six inches of the plant, are cooked in similar fashion to the *broccoletti di rape*, and it has a rare and delicate flavor. Orlando is often to be seen in spring gathering *luperi* by the stream and his favorite way of eating it is chopped and stewed with garlic in a little pan, then covered with beaten egg to make a *frittata*. *Luperi* are wild hops and were eaten by the ancient Romans.⁴

Gathering wild foods is part of the daily food preparation:

Silvana likes to wander in the fields and gather up an *insalata di campo* for supper. This "field salad" is a selection of young plants to be found on grassy banks and near hedges. Silvana is expert at finding these plants. Some are like tiny thistle leaves, others are serrated like the dandelion and others look like daisy plants with



Sunday dinner at the vineyard with relatives and friends, herbs and greens harvested from the vineyard, wine from its grapes, and meat from a neighbor's pig. Domenico is at the head of the table.

small white roots that are also edible. They have local names like *ramponcioli*, *bianchella* and *radagolio*. They make an interesting and unusually textured salad seasoned in the usual way with olive oil, wine vinegar or lemon juice, salt and a little black pepper.⁵

Farmers harvest wild plants growing on the edges of their fields, in fallow fields, or in the woods that surround their farm. This presupposes the existence of “wildness,” that is, uncultivated land, roadsides that are not mowed, and, significantly, a lack of herbicide. Many of these plants are weeds in modern parlance—that is, plants that monocultural farmers eliminate.

The world Romer describes may seem exotic to the Bolognese urbanites we interviewed, but it is common in the country, just a few miles away. We are at the long rustic table in the dining room in Roberta and Domenico's country house, surrounded by four hundred acres of vineyard. The vines are terraced into the hills, and across the hills are similarly striking landscapes, fading into the sunset. It is where Sangiovese di Romagna is produced, one of the most accomplished red wines of northern Italy. A fire is burning at one end of the room; Chiara has grilled meat from animals raised by neighbors.

Roberta and Domenico manage their vineyard organically, and wild plants grow in profusion. Like Silvana and Orlando, Domenico and Roberta harvest them regularly. I had brought copies of photos I had made the year before (including the photo that opens this chapter), and Roberta says, “Yes, the *spugnola*, in the photo Rita has a *spugnola*. Also there is the *sfiandrine* [a mushroom with no translation], the *finferli* [chanterelle].”

Domenico tells us, “We harvest the nettle, then asparagus, spinach, garden rocket [*rucola*] in addition to the nettle. You ate pasta today with nettle.” It is harvested near the nearby lake, behind a fence, kept separate from animals and their waste.

“In general we harvest the *taraxacum* [dandelion],” Roberta continues, “the *stridoli* [a green, called ‘cowbell’ in the United Kingdom], the chicory, the field balm, the wild asparagus, the rocket, the nettle, the morels, the mauve.”

How do they use these plants in their cuisine?

“It depends on the different plants,” Chiara says. “With the nettle and the mauve you can do the risotto or the stuffed pasta. The chicory, the rocket and the *taraxacum* are good in the salads. You can use the asparagus in the omelet or to make the sauce for the pasta. You can eat the morels with the eggs or you can make a risotto.”

One of the two sons-in-law, Franco (there are fifteen people at the table—three generations of the family and guests), describes the rosemary they harvest from the fields, growing wild. Chiara adds, “And fruit: plums, apricots, *kaki* [Japanese persimmon]. The name of the vineyard is Luogoraro, which means ‘rare place’—near the sea, but higher, so you can find the things you usually find in the mountains. It is difficult to find a place like this, close to the sea and with characteristics of the mountains, a microclimate.”

But it is not only agriculturalists who value and are able to use wild foods; these are easily found in local markets and even large supermarkets. Maria, who lives in Bologna, uses unusual herbs in her cooking. She says that she “always choose strange, different, attractive things, for example, there is a seed called *misticanza* that produces this small strange herb, green, red, with the *rucola*, all together in the same piece of ground. It’s very good, very young, very fresh. And I also discovered, in the supermarket, some small pots, called the *rustica*, where there are strange herbs. In this season I very much like going around the country to pick herbs, especially in Mantova. In a little while we’ll pick the plants of the poppy, when they are still very small, and then you boil them, and fry them slowly like spinach, and they are very good. Or there is the *taraxacum*—do you know that yellow flower? Now it is still very small, and it’s very good with the balsamic vinegar, which is slightly bitter, or even cooked. In Framura, in Liguria, where we have a house, I learned to know the

herbs that grow there. I very much like this research. In fact, my husband tells that if I were alone and had nothing to eat, I would not die, because of all the herbs I would find.”

Turning nature’s bounty into nutritious and tasty food is an attractive ideal, but the increasing urbanity of Italy (and the increasingly suburban sprawl) threatens these wild places and the traditions they represent. Yet these food traditions have lost little of their importance in the shared cultural consciousness. Barbara made us lasagna flavored with wild nettles; Side uses wild herbs and greens in her cooking. At the other end of the social and cultural scale, Egeria based several of her exotic dishes on foods harvested from the wild.

Historically speaking, people mostly harvested wild foods because they had little else to eat. Entire regions subsisted on chestnuts, roasted, or dried and made into flour. Nuts were integral to Roman diets (primarily for the poor); the peasants of the mountain village west of Bologna that Rudolph Bell studied regarded chestnuts as a staple; when Francesca and Agnese were sent to the hills during World War II they ate chestnuts in one form or another every day. Alison Leitch describes food festivals in the marble quarry villages of northwest Italy that feature pancakes made from chestnut flour—a memory, she says, from years of poverty and war.⁶

These are not special foods; when they are no longer needed they are forgotten. None of the Bolognese we met served us any foods made with chestnut flour, though I once brought Francesca a gift of candied chestnuts, which she regarded as a delightful memory. In Italian cities now there are always a handful of old men in rough country garb selling roasted chestnuts—a wonderful smell for a food with a pasty texture and insubstantial taste. They appear to owe their existence to nostalgia, a modest commodification of a cultural memory.

Plants were (and are) used as medicine as well as poison. Knowledge of these properties conveyed social power (the ancient doctor who healed or the assassin who poisoned). Women who knew the secret properties of wild foods were typically classified as witches.⁷ So harvesting wild foods in contemporary Italy requires knowledge as well as confidence: one mushroom, almost indistinguishable from another, will end your life or make you very ill; the foliage of common plants, including black nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*), hemlock, a member of the parsley family, and tansy ragwort (*Tanacetum vulgare*), is poisonous.

The environment has become polluted in many places; it is no longer enough to identify the plants—one must also determine their purity. Wild foods sprayed with herbicide carry that poison, and the wastes of pets or wild animals ruin nearby plants. Illegal burning of toxic wastes near Naples (organized by the organized crime families—the Camorra) has damaged soil and water for the

crops that are consumed by water buffalo that provide the milk; in the spring of 2008 seven countries banned the importation of *mozzarella di bufala*, the most noteworthy cheese of southern Italy.⁸

But our scene in northern rural Italy is more pristine and inviting. With Roberta, Domenico, and Maria's help, we have gathered the materials for a salad and, from a small herb garden, the basil for tomato sauce. Perhaps we've picked some mushrooms for the pasta or some nettle to mix into the dough to make a faintly green and arrestingly savory noodle. In doing we've begun to understand the origins of this cuisine.

VEGETABLES FROM THE GARDEN: GOLDEN APPLES (*POMO D'ORO*)

Crops have been cultivated in Italy since the era before the Roman era, but we shall discuss a latecomer to the Italian cuisine, one that more than any other defines the culinary tradition. No surprise here—it is the tomato.

We are at the second step of our analysis: the study of wild plants adapted to human use. Adapting plants to human use involves gathering seeds and planting them, protecting and nourishing the plants, and eventually improving varieties through hybridization. Natural hybridization takes place when the pollen of the flowers of one plant pollinates the flowers of another variety, and the resulting seeds carry characteristics of both plants. Nature cross-pollinates randomly; humans have adapted, nudged, and cajoled varieties into new forms through controlled cross-pollination. From this perspective we are interested in how the modern Italian tomato has been genetically constructed, in the context of global constructions of the tomato.

The tomato adapts to most climates in Italy. It is relatively easy to grow and it is prolific: a handful of plants on a small plot can provide several bushels of fruit. The numerous varieties find niches in many Italian menus. Tomatoes are best eaten fresh, but they are amenable to storage through drying, canning, or freezing. Above all, tomatoes are important in Italian cuisine because they work especially well with other typical Italian foods such as olive oil, basil, pasta, or the bread form of wheat flour, pizza! It is excellent raw or made into a sauce, or it can be half-cooked by simply adding hot pasta. It welcomes characteristic spices and tastes of Italy, including garlic, basil, and oregano.

The Italian tomato (*pomodoro*) is a product of colonialism; conquistadors found it in Mexico and South America and brought it to Europe in the fifteenth century. It was adopted as a food only gradually because it is a member of the nightshade family and resembles some well-known poisonous plants. These prejudices were strongest in northern Europe, but it took until the nineteenth

century for the tomato to become a staple in Italy. It was called *pomodoro* (golden apple), apparently because the tomatoes introduced to Italy from Latin America were small, yellow, and hard. It took the superior soil and climate of Italy (as well as the breeding skill of Italian farmers), to create the tasty, red and juicy plant of today. In fact, because the tomato matches so well with pasta, it is credited for expanding the market for pasta as it became easier to make in the early factories of Naples.

Tomatoes became popular in the United States because of Italian immigration; before the waves of Italian immigration in the late nineteenth century, they had been rare. Hunger for tomatoes in off-season (and where tomatoes could not be easily grown) stimulated the export of canned tomatoes from Italy to the United States. In fact, canned tomatoes were one of the first industrial products in Italy, primarily to provision the emigrant population.⁹

The international popularity of the tomato is also connected to the pizza, invented in the 1880s in Naples. Italians enjoy repeating the story that the most famous pizza, the Margherita, was made by a restaurateur who was called upon to produce a pizza for Queen Margherita, the first Italian monarch since Napoleon had conquered Italy. The restaurateur used ingredients the color of the Italian flag: green basil, white mozzarella cheese, and red pizza sauce. The Margherita remains the standard pizza in Italy, and the most famous pizza restaurant in Naples serves only that variety.¹⁰ When the pizza became an international star, so did the tomato.

Tomatoes are almost infinitely variable due to hybrid breeding and genetic manipulation. Strains that are the most disease resistant or physically rugged may lack taste or juiciness, and the ripe fruits of the most tender varieties are almost impossible to ship. Efforts to breed a tomato that both tastes good and is marketable at some distance from where it was grown has led to the practice of picking the fruit while green, shipping while it is still hard, and then spraying it with ethylene (which is, to be fair, produced by the plant during its ripening process) to ripen it on grocery store shelves.

More advanced attempts to create a shippable tomato has been done through genetic manipulation. An example is the “Flavr Savr,” produced in the United States in the early 1980s. The parent firm modified tomato genetics to create a hard red tomato that could be handled like a tennis ball during picking and shipping and was supposed to taste as good as the original. Here we introduce the concept of “organoleptic tests,” which food experts use to measure the taste, appearance, odor, and feel of foods—that is, in attempts to quantify and standardize the subjectivities of taste. The Flavr Savr did poorly organoleptically (it failed the taste tests), and it failed in the public eye, in part because of fear of genetic manipulation (the creation of “super weeds” or other unantici-

pated consequences from the cross-breeding of natural and genetically altered plants).¹¹ That tomato was withdrawn from the American market, but in the meantime similar winter tomatoes have become common.

What does this mean for the Italian construction of food? The variability of the tomato makes the search for the delicious and shippable tomato never ending. For Italian cuisine to work, the tomato must be fresh, juicy, and tasty (or, in the case of sauces, juicy and tasty). If high-quality fresh tomatoes are not available for sauces, Italians prefer canned tomatoes, and in midwinter, that is what most of the people we interviewed (and Patrizia) use. There are fresh tomatoes in Italy in the winter, but they appear from my unscientific survey to be vine ripened. In any case, the future of the Italian tomato will unfold in a European if not global context. If a person has never eaten a garden-fresh tomato, they never know, as the cliché goes, what they have missed and will be satisfied with the poor second that so many purchased tomatoes represent.

So we pick some Roma tomatoes from our garden and cook them (as Silvia *due* instructed us) slowly, with only a little bit of salt, and in three hours we have our sauce. Just tomatoes, but the right ones, and with the right attention.

EXTRACTING PRECIOUS FOODS: LIQUID GOLD

We now describe a second level of harvesting natural food—the process of extracting an essence from a natural food. Our example is olive oil.

Oil from olives is an ancient food; olive trees were cultivated before humans perfected writing, and olive oil was an important commodity in the Mediterranean world long before Rome became a world power. Olympian athletes spread it on their bodies; several religions used it as a sacrament; and in Italy it became an essential element of the cuisine. It is attractive, it smells and tastes good, and it is healthy. Extra virgin olive oil (first pressing, with less than 1 percent acidity) is the “most digestible of the edible fats: it helps to assimilate vitamins A, D and K; it contains so-called essential acids that cannot be produced by our own bodies; it slows down the aging process; and it helps bile, liver and intestinal functions. Medical experiments have shown that extra virgin oil improves the elasticity of arterial walls, which may partly explain the lower incidence of heart attacks and strokes where olive oil is consumed on a daily basis.”¹²

But there are olive oils and there are olive oils. Factors such as the species of the olive tree, its location (climate, soil type), the care of the olive (including harvest techniques and storage prior to manufacture), the production method (critical—including issues such as whether the olive has been squashed cold, heated, or had the oil removed chemically), and the subsequent storage of oil, all influence its taste. There are costs associated with various outcomes—for example, trees grown near the sea have up to twenty times more production, but



Stefy describes the sauce: “I used the tomato San Marzano that I bought at the supermarket. This tomato is good for a sauce. I think that here in Italy the most important thing is the quality of ingredients. A very simple sauce (like my sauce, having only onion, olives, oil, and basil)—when made with good ingredients became a very delicious sauce. A diner must be able to identify every taste, every ingredient, and not treat the sauce as a mix.”

the trees that grow in the arid interior produce what is considered to be superior oil. The first crushing of the olive must follow certain procedures to classify as “extra virgin”—the top classification in a scheme of nearly ten ranks of oil.

Biba Caggiano explains:

To qualify as extra virgin, the oil must be produced without chemical means, by stone-crushing and cold-pressing hand-picked olives, and it must have under 1 percent acidity, the lowest acidity of any olive oil. The characteristics, flavor, and aroma of an olive oil are strictly tied to their place of origin and to the individual producer. It is fruity and somewhat peppery in Tuscany and Umbria, light and fragrant in some parts of the Veneto, mild and unobtrusive in Liguria, fuller in body, color, and taste in Puglia and Sicily.¹³

Ranking oils, however, is complicated. Below are terms used by professional oil tasters, showing how oil is valued or critiqued by the organoleptic investigator:

POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES

apple

buttery

fresh (good aroma, fruity, not oxidized)

fruity (an oil is fruity when its flavor and aroma are similar to that of a mature olive)

grass (the taste of grass)

green (a young, fresh, fruity oil, spicy-bitter; causes cough sensation at the back of the throat)

green leaf (a sensation obtained when in the press a small quantity of fresh olive leaves are added)

harmonious (all the qualities of the oil)

hay (dried grass flavor)

melon (perfumy)

musky, nutty, woody (very pleasing when not overpowering)

peppery (a bite in the back of the throat)

pungent (a rough, burning, or biting sensation in the throat—peppery)

soave (sweet, palatable aftertaste)

rotund (an oil with a pasty body that fills and satisfies)

sweet (the opposite of bitter, stringent, or pungent)

NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES

almond (sweet oils with a flat scent)

bitter (a good trait in moderation but bad if overpowering—produced by olives that are unripe and with little meat)

brine (salty taste)

burnt (produced from prolonged heating during processing)

cucumber (off flavor from prolonged storage, particularly in tin)

dirty (oils that have absorbed the unpleasant odors and flavors of the vegetable water after pressing)

dreggish (odor of warm lubricating oil, caused by poor execution of the decanting process)

earthy (having a musty humid odor because oil has been pressed from unwashed, muddy olives)

esparto (hemplike flavor acquired when olive paste has been spread on Esparto mats)

fiscolo (caused by the use of filtering panels that are not perfectly cleaned)

flat (oils that have lost their characteristic aroma and have no taste)

frozen (due to olives' exposure to freezing temperatures)

fusty (due to olives' fermenting in piles while in storage awaiting for pressing)

greasy (a diesel, gasoline, or bearing grease flavor)

grubby (flavor imparted by grubs of the olive fly)

hay-wood (dried olive taste)

heated (burnt taste caused by prolonged heating during processing)

impersonal (a serious defect for virgin oil, because it means it has neither character nor personality)

lampantino (oil that should be sent to a refinery; when it does not present awful organic characteristics, it can be edible)

muddy sediment

musty (moldy flavor from being stored too long before pressing)

metallic (processed or stored with extended contact to metal surfaces)

moldy (from unhealthy or fermented olives due to excessive storage in warehouses)

olearic fly (oil from fruit stricken by this insect: the flavor is rotten and putrid at the same time)

phenic acid (pertaining to poorly kept, very old oils)

poor conservation (the oil absorbs the odors and flavors of everything surrounding it even if not in direct contact)

rancid (old oils that have started oxidizing due to exposure to light or air)

rough (pasty, thick, greasy mouth feel)

warmth (due to the fermentation of olives kept too long in bags)

winey (high acidic taste)¹⁴

Amazing, indeed. This listing reflects an expert consciousness, to be sure, but normal Italians also have a remarkably advanced sense of what makes olive oil good and what makes it bad. It is not sufficient to buy "extra virgin olive oil" in Italy and leave it at that. Our subjects chose oil carefully (and were willing to buy expensive oil), and most families had several bottles of oil, important parts of their kitchens. One of our subjects described an oil he had received as a gift as "so precious that it would be impossible to sell, so it is only given away."

We were often invited to taste special oils: pouring small amounts into saucers, dipping small, torn corners of bread into one oil after another, cleansing



Vito explains the oil we are about to taste.

the palate between tastes. These were not parts of meals but tasting experiences, demonstrations and discussions of taste.

In recent years Vito has become one of those Italians who search the country (actually or on the internet) for the tastiest, healthiest, and the most affordable food for his family cuisine. Pino kids his father: “Now, nothing inorganic may pass through the doors of this house!”

Prior to a Sunday feast at their home, Vito and I tasted oil he had bought over the Internet from a farm from Liguria, near Genoa, in one of Italy’s best microclimates for olive cultivation. The farm, Fratelli Carli, sells only through its own networks. Vito explains, “These products are not sold in the shops. You have to have a direct relation with the farm, and you call and order by phone or the Internet.” As Vito describes the detective work that has brought him this oil, I am impressed that in a country where high-quality olive oil is not exactly hard to find, it is still possible to market such an exotic version! But because the middleman has been eliminated, the price remains reasonable, about eight euros per liter. The quality can be smelled, tasted, and seen, and the farm guarantees unadulterated production.

Vito buys two kinds of oil, extra virgin for salads and a less distinctive oil for cooking. The farm also markets its oil as part of other products (you can only use so much oil!), so Vito also buys olives as well as perfumes, pesto, olive pâté, and soap, all containing the good oil. But that is not all. The farm also sells tuna fish guaranteed to have been caught in adjoining waters and stored in its oil. Because Vito likes this company, he also buys wine from it, a sweet Sicilian Marsala, vinegar from Liguria, and, somehow, pickles that have some faint connection to the same farm’s olive oil. They clearly have Vito hooked.

I ask Vito about the oils from the regions of Italy where he grew up. He explains, “The oil from the south is denser and heavier. After forty years of living in Bologna, I cannot eat the oil from the south any more. This oil from Liguria is more delicate—the taste is more delicate.”

Many of Libera’s dishes, however, have a southern origin, and I ask Vito whether they adapt to the oils he is now accustomed to. Vito answers “Sure, it is fragrant. This dish [we were about to eat Libera’s swordfish] is from a recipe from the south, lightened in its taste by some ingredients from the north. And the oil counts a lot in changing the taste of a dish. I’ll illustrate with an example: Once, in Liguria, they made a stronger-tasting oil, quite similar to the southern one. I tried it. It is not so acidic and strong as the southern oil, but it has a more distinctive taste. And I bought it, to try it in the salad, and I saw there it has a little stronger taste. But it is not so acidic as the southern oil. I’m not speaking about the oil one can find in the supermarkets; I’m speaking about artisan production, the one you buy directly from the farmers. The difference in taste and acidity is less evident in the industrial oil you can find in the supermarkets.



Vito shows his products bought over the Internet from the organic olive orchard in Liguria: aftershave, two kinds of oil, wine, and tuna—in oil

Now we will taste the two kinds of oil produced by this farm, the more delicate and the stronger one. We use the delicate one to cook and the more distinctive one for the salad. If you cook with the stronger one, the food becomes heavier and the strong taste of the oil can cover the other flavors. To cook, it is better to use the normal olive oil than the extra virgin one.”

We tear small pieces of bread and dip it into the oils, and the difference in taste is striking. From the list above, I would chose “musky” and “nutty,” characteristics that are very pleasing when not overpowering. And I would add “peppery,” for it does produce “a peppery bite in the back of the throat” that can force a cough.

Olive oil appears in most Italian dishes, in one form or another. Vito describes how the oil works in the swordfish recipe: “You wash the fish, then marinate it for some hours in olive oil—the light one, not to cover the fish taste—with a bit of garlic and parsley. Then you cook it on the hot plate.”

I tell Libera it was cooked perfectly. Vito adds: “These organic asparagus are dressed just with oil.”

Pino says, “When I was in the army, the food was disgusting, so I had dinner out, and for lunch I took just bread and olive oil.”

Olive oil is important in Italy for several factors. It was an acceptable fat during the “lean” days of the liturgical calendar and replaced lard or butter for many days of the year. It is ubiquitous throughout Italy and as such defines

much of what is “Italian” about Italian cooking, yet it also marks regionalism because different trees, climates, and conditions create very different oils. Historically, olive oil was “colonized” by butter when Germanic invasions changed Italian culture, and in the north (and in Emilia Romagna, one of the few dairy regions) olive oil coexists with butter. It is an especially desirable food because along with beans and pasta it produces almost a complete diet.¹⁵

So we keep our oils handy, to drizzle on pasta when it comes out of the water, to add in very small amounts to our sauce, and to add in tiny amounts to our salad.

FOODS FROM CULTIVATED CROPS: PASTA

Our next step in increasingly complex food takes us to pasta, emblem and spiritual center of Italian cuisine. While it seems simple enough—flour mixed with water, kneaded, then extruded, rolled flat, or cut into various shapes and dried—making it is quite complex. The history and cultural significance of pasta is well told by Silvano Serventi and Francoise Sabban, whose work should be consulted by anyone wishing an in-depth portrait of this food.¹⁶

Pasta is an offspring of the first entirely human-made food, bread, which came into existence about ten thousand years ago, as people learned to domesticate cereals. Wheat berries were first roasted over a fire to burn off the husk; eventually people learned to grind them up and add water, making a paste that could be baked into flatbread on a hot rock. This was the first bread, developed subsequently with various varieties of wheat and with or without yeast to make it “rise.” There is evidence that during the earliest era of rudimentary bread making in China, people learned to pull the dough apart, let it dry, and then cook it in water—presto, pasta!

Roman diet featured bread, and there is evidence of food that might pass for modern pasta. Historian Pamela Johns notes that “in the first century A.D. in his book *De Re Coquinaria*, Roman historian Apicius describes an ancient Roman dish made of wide strips of fresh pasta layered with meat, fish, and eggs. The dish was called *lagano* . . . which may have evolved to the modern name, lasagna.”¹⁷ But this may have simply been strips of bread layered in the dish, given that there were no instructions for cooking this or other pastas. So there is no definitive understanding of how pasta actually came to or was developed in Italy. It first shows up in medieval texts and clearly influenced cuisines as well as politics and economics, in Italy and internationally, in that era.

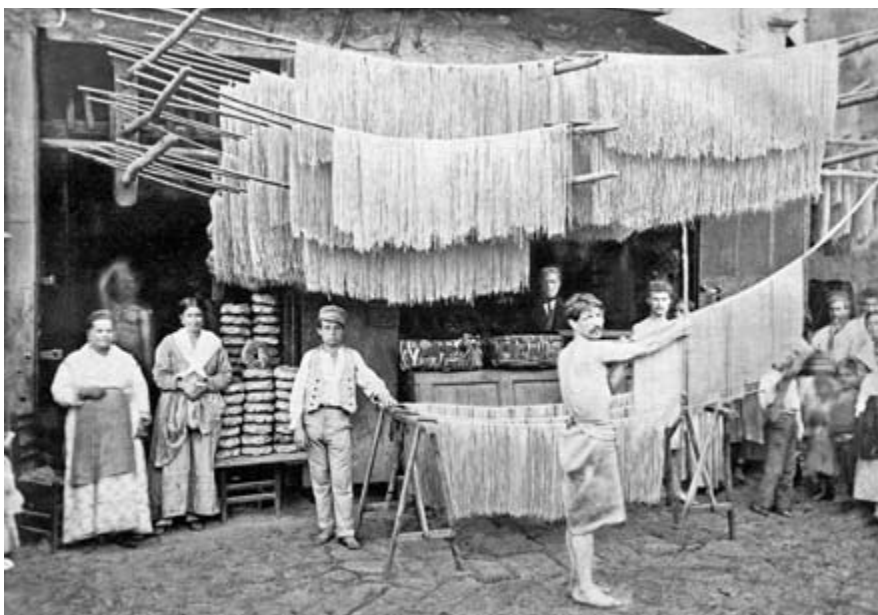
Italian pasta was from the beginning either of two types. The easiest shorthand to keep this straight is to think of “two pastas,” as part of the contrasts between the “two Italies, north and south.”



"Threshing in the village square, by flail method." (Original caption.) Photographer unknown; photo is undated but likely early twentieth century. This method of separating the chaff from the wheat was unchanged from the days of the Romans. Mussolini sought to modernize the threshing process (by the time he assumed power, threshers and even combines had been in use in the United States and northern Europe for several decades), and so the process pictured here would become obsolete by the 1930s.

The most typical modern pasta (what Italians call *pastasciutta*—dry pasta) is made from a family of durum wheat varieties. Durum wheat prospers in hot, windy, and dry environments and also those that have extremes in temperature. In Italy durum wheat grows well in Sicily and several areas of the southern boot, including regions near Naples and in Puglia. It grows well in the interior south (Basilicata) and coastal regions, especially Puglia. It does not prosper in Emilia-Romagna, the site of our study, nor in other northern Italian climates.

Italy has relatively little arable land in relation to its population and has always had to satisfy its hunger for wheat through trade. In Roman times Italy imported wheat from Egypt and other African nations through the port city of Ostia, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when pasta became an Italian staple, Italians traded for durum wheat grown in Ukraine and the Volga River Valley in southern Russia. Those Russian varieties were imported into the United States in the early twentieth century, and after much public relations work by a highly motivated American secretary of agriculture, durum wheat was successfully introduced in the Dakotas (and subsequently to the wheat-fields that lie to the north in Canada). To this day much Italian pasta depends on wheat grown in the United States or Canada.



"Pasta drying, Naples, early 20th century." (Original caption.) Photographer unknown. This is one of several steps in the drying of pasta in the craft mode of production.

Durum wheat is high in glutens, proteins that produce elasticity and strength. To make pasta, wheat is ground to a coarse grade, which is what the term *semolina* refers to. Durum semolina is coarse-ground hard wheat, perfect for the traditional spaghetti and other pastas of the south (soft wheat, which we'll come to momentarily, can also be ground coarse—semolina—but not to make pasta). Because it takes two to three hours to knead and several days to dry in nonindustrial settings, durum wheat pasta was very demanding to make and therefore expensive.

Several technical revolutions made pasta production easier. The first was a mechanical "brake," developed in the sixteenth century, that lightened the backbreaking work of kneading pasta.¹⁸ In this era, kneaded pasta dough was rolled flat and cut into shapes or extruded through dies. Dies are dinner-plate-sized pieces of thick bronze through which holes have been drilled. You push the kneaded pasta through, and because it is tough durum semolina, it does not come apart. Out the other side emerge long thin noodles (spaghetti), small or large tubes (penne of various types), or other shapes. It is almost impossible to push the pasta through the dies by hand, and the development of a human-powered winch eased this task considerably. The extruded pasta from the earliest era, however, had one distinguishing feature that remains important: the interior surface of the bronze dies conveyed its roughness to the surface of the pasta, and sauces clung to this surface.

The pasta-manufacturing revolution continued in the nineteenth century with water power (hydraulics), and eventually steam-powered engines were substituted for human power.¹⁹ The tasks were the same: mixing flour and water, kneading it into dough, and cutting it into shapes. As automation began to enter the process, human labor was relegated to moving raw materials to the machines and moving the finished pasta to drying stations. Greater manufacturing efficiency made pasta cheaper and more popular. Most of the manufacture during this era was done in small shops in southern Italy, with Naples at the center. The Neapolitan had become synonymous with pasta consumption (the term *lazzarone* is a Neapolitan scoundrel, a street-smart pasta eater); it was fast food dished out steaming hot on the streets, served with a bit of oil or cheese, and eaten by hand. It was cheap and nutritious, but the image symbolized an Italian personality that infuriated Mussolini a hundred years later. For him it represented all the things that were wrong with Italy: the cleverness and lack of seriousness, the pleasure brought by food. Mussolini's "Battle for Grain" sought to make Italy a country of disciplined bread eaters.²⁰

Until the midtwentieth century, pasta was still made by artisans. Naples had the perfect conditions for drying pasta, including hot winds from the south and cold winds from the north (often on the same day), intense sun and low humidity. Clean water was abundant, and durum wheat grew in the adjoining regions. Serventi and Sabban write, "As long as drying was an entirely natural process, the pasta makers of the Gulf of Naples maintained their supremacy, and it is hardly surprising that the producers of the northern regions were the first to pursue research into artificial drying processes."²¹

Drying was done in three steps, *indurimento* (stiffening), where the pasta is exposed to the direct sun and wind, giving it a tough outer core; *rinvenimento* (recovery), where the pasta is moved inside to a cool, still, and dark environment; and *essicazione definitiva* (final drying), where the pasta is moved again to an environment with some sunlight and some moving air, such as an outside room with a slatted ceiling—it is left there for several days to slowly finish. Managing this process required knowing when pasta had completed certain phases of its drying, which meant understanding how the sun, humidity, and winds worked together. This was a several-day process, depending on the season, and since the pasta was hung outside for at least the first step of the drying, it was not particularly hygienic. One imagines a gorgeous seaside setting, with pasta gently waving in clean breezes, but in reality it was often dried along dusty roads in environments with lots of insects, birds, and other sources of potential pollution.

Proper drying produced what most Italians refer to as the genuine article, to be cooked *al dente*, firm but pliable, chewy but moist. Until mechanical drying chambers were developed in the twentieth century, southern Italy, especially



The Buitoni factory for pasta manufacture. 1928. No location or photographer listed.

Naples, where the sun shone and the winds blew properly, was the center of the pasta world.

In the late 1930s, on the eve of World War II, a “continuous production” pasta-manufacturing machine was developed in Milan. The prototype measured flour, added water, mixed and then kneaded dough, and extruded or pressed it into shape. The war halted the development of this revolutionary technology, but in the 1950s American manufacturers perfected the system, eventually adding computerization, Teflon-coated dies, and flash drying. These changes diminished the nutritional quality (inferior flours were substituted for more expensive and harder to use durum semolina), and the surface created by the Teflon made a slippery pasta that sauce did not stick to. The flash drying changed the texture and taste of the food.²² American mass production was much cheaper (dough could be pushed through the Teflon-coated dies at four times the rate of bronze dies, and flash drying took only minutes), and the result was an inferior product in taste, texture, and nutritional quality, a product that relies mostly on a market that has never experienced the original. To a large extent this explains the American admiration of Italian food experienced in Italy. Suddenly pasta is a tasty food with a distinctive texture—a food in and of itself.

We shall now briefly sketch the history of soft wheat pasta, which is what our Bolognese friends eat when they enjoy homemade or artisan-produced tortellini or ravioli.

The differences between the two worlds of pasta begin with the variety of wheat. Bolognese pasta is made from common “soft” wheat with the Latin name

meat, cheese, or vegetables they must be pasteurized and carefully monitored as to freshness. The most common nonstuffed egg-based soft wheat pasta is the iconic Bolognese *tagliatelle*, the yellow ribbon pasta that is accompanied by *ragù*. And we keep in mind that *ragù* is never—repeat, never—served with Neapolitan spaghetti!

These are rich and yielding pastas that fit other contours of Bolognese cuisine: rich meats, cream sauces, *parmigiano*. They are the pastas of the wealthy.

Italy's dominance of the pasta universe has always required compromise. Dating to the Middle Ages, pure semolina was already the most sought-after wheat, but it was generally too precious to use by itself. Only the very rich ate pastas made with pure semolina! The trade in durum wheat was unstable, which contributed to the food crises of the late nineteenth century. When Mussolini forbade the importation of wheat during his "Battle for Grain," the effect was to force Italian manufacturers to combine less desirable but more common soft flours with semolina to keep up with demand. During the 1930s the Italian pastas were rated for quality, with 100 percent semolina pasta virtually impossible to obtain. Italy's 1967 law to guarantee pure semolina pasta was possible only because the country was by then wealthy enough to trade with the Americas for commodities to meet the demand.

The development of a pasta industry had deep economic consequences in different parts of Italy. Perfecting the industrial manufacture of pasta was integral to Italy's postwar recovery. The industrial system required large capital investment, and small firms were driven out of business in the process. In this industrial concentration only one in ten pasta manufacturers survived, and very few in the south.²³ The concentration of the industry virtually destroyed one of the economic pillars of the already economically underdeveloped south of Italy. Small shop production has now returned to Italy in the form of artisan manufacture, and that has been largely a northern phenomenon. In this way the development of a modern pasta industry has contributed to the "de-development" of the Italian south.

The politics of compromise that underlies the production of "Italian pasta" has an interesting chapter in contemporary European politics. Italy's membership in the European Community allows the importation of pasta that is made according to the laws of the country of origin rather than the country of destination. Pasta can therefore be imported into Italy from Greece and other EU countries that do not require 100 percent semolina, and the result is that Italy's own quality standards are threatened by the laws of greater Europe. The importation of pastas that did not meet Italian standards produced an outcry in Italy. However, because Italians are fiercely loyal not only to the idea of "pure" pasta (100 percent semolina) but also to their own manufacturers, these lower-grade imported pastas have had little impact on their internal markets.²⁴

We end the discussion of pasta on a positive note. I can find in my Italian grocery store in Pittsburgh artisan-made pasta that equals the best I can find in Italy. Even my supermarket now carries Italian brands made with bronze dies, dried over several hours, and made with 100 percent durum semolina. This is a result of fifteen years or more of renewed interest in artisan-made pasta, which has led to a mini-industry throughout Italy.²⁵ Coinciding roughly with the Slow Food Movement, it has reawakened interest in Italy and abroad in older methods that are less efficient yet produce a better product. The key elements are excellent durum wheat, pure water mixed at a cool temperature, extrusion through bronze dies, and carefully monitored drying that resembles the natural drying of the old pastas. It is exceptional food, nothing like the pasta I ate growing up, and based on the experience of my American students in Rome, who are startled at the taste, texture, and substance of Italian pasta, it differs substantially from the fare they are served at home or in the Olive Gardens of American high-end fast food.

PRODUCING MEAT AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: *PROSCIUTTO AND LARDO*

We now describe the process of turning easily rotted animal matter into exquisite Italian delicacies. We are speaking of curing meats, which was until refrigeration one of few ways meat could be preserved. The result, *prosciutto*, defines Italian cuisine as well as any other single product. An interesting segue directs our attention to the curing of lard, another example of how Italians under the duress of poverty make valued commodities of substances that in other cultures are considered inedible.

We pose several questions:

- How have Italians refined simple processes to make high-quality foods?
- How has each of these products become culturally defined—becoming a symbol as well as a material product)?
- How are they marketed?
- How do they play in the international politics of food identity?

To answer these questions we focus on the production and consumption of ham (*prosciutto*) and lard (*lardo*), foods treasured and debased, which are, in fact, just different parts of the pig.

Before the recent invention of refrigeration, meat was preserved by curing. *Dry curing* is the oldest way to cure meats; one simply adds enough salt to cover the meat and then lets it stand. The salt dehydrates the meat (the liquid that emerges from the curing meat is called *brine*), and without water, bacteria have a difficult time growing. Curing does not preserve meat indefinitely but



Prosciutti in a shop in Bologna

slows down the spoilage, by months or even longer. While dry curing is simple on the surface, it depends on skill and knowledge. Too much salt and drying produce tough, salty meat that one would eat only in desperation; too little salt and the meat will spoil. To make a food as exquisite as Italian *prosciutto* (or *lardo*) takes artfulness in technique and production.

Prosciutti were made in the homes of peasants throughout Italy. We revisit Romer's book for a description of this process:

It is about a month since the butcher put the four enormous hams into their wooden tubs of salt and garlic. Every day or two Silvana has climbed the wide stone stairs to the rooms under the eaves where the tubs are kept, in order to turn the *prosciutto* so that every part is well and evenly treated with salt. Now she judges that they are in a fit state to be brought down to the kitchen. . . . She climbs onto the kitchen table and hangs the *prosciutti* from the beams by the kitchen door using large meat hooks that are pushed through the hocks. They will remain for another few weeks hanging in the well circulating air, where she can watch their progress as they dry. Drops of salty water will ooze from them and splash onto the tiles. When three weeks or so are up Silvana will take down the hams and wash them well with her own wine vinegar, dry them carefully with clean cloths and cover the entire surfaces with finely ground black pepper. Then they will be ready to hang with the *salame* from the beams over the pantry's huge meat safe.²⁶

Silvana's working knowledge, developed over generations of peasant life, produced hams from the pigs her family butchered. *Prosciutto* was made to be

eaten in thin slices and savored; a family would typically butcher a single pig, and the *prosciutti* lasted the family for months. It was a practical way to deal with the quantity of food that butchering a pig produced.

We transfer this process to the rich lands of Emilia-Romagna to find the most respected version of the food. The *prosciutti* of Emilia-Romagna are considered the best of Italy, and within the region some hams are believed to excel in this competitive environment. They are made from particular breeds of pigs that are fed special diets, and artisans monitor their curing over months or years. In the meantime they have become a symbol as well as a reality. When one eats *prosciutto di Parma* one eats what is believed to be highest achievement in ham production. The search for the perfect *prosciutto* implies a ranking of quality with clear winners and losers.

A part of this process is the use of language usually reserved for other parts of life to describe the food and its setting. For example, Biba Caggiano, Bolognese gourmand and food writer, tells us: “The quality and fragrance of *prosciutto di Parma*, one of Europe’s most prized hams, is derived from several factors. The special breed of pig used is fed a high-protein diet of grains and whey. Also important is the *salatura*, centuries-old curing method of massaging sea salt into the meat. The *stagionatura*, the slow, natural air-curing and aging of the hams that takes place in the luscious hills of Langhirano . . . [is] blessed by perfect climatic and ecological conditions.”²⁷

But it is not enough to be a *prosciutto di Parma*. There are within this region of excellence even greater achievements in ham making, due to conditions that are unique to subregions. Caggiano writes:

Culatello is the most prized and delectable ham of the region. Made in and around several small towns of the Bassa Parmense (the Parma lowland), an area along the Po River shrouded in morning fog, *culatello* is known to the people of the region as “Sua Maestà il Culatello,” “King of Hams.” Shaped something like a pear, round at the bottom and narrower at the top, *cutatello* weighs between six and eight pounds. Its meat, which is sweet, moist and pleasantly savory, is cured much like *prosciutto di Parma*, and takes its particular identity from the unique microclimate of the area; fog and humidity being some of the important elements.²⁸

Hams have “fragrance” rather than “odor”; sea salt replaces banal everyday salt and is “massaged” into the meat, which is about the weight of a newborn human! The environment could not be more attractive: luscious hills, blessed by perfect climate and ecology, and even fog and humidity are seen as a “unique microclimate” without which the pigs would not develop a certain taste to be transformed into the most exquisite of the best hams of Italy. The result? The *king* of hams!

When one reads these descriptions (and many are more excessive than Cagianò's), one thinks, Yes, this is perfection; likely even the pig manure carries the scent of wildflowers. The Italian cookbook industry is part of this process of reification, and the cookbooks' spectacular color photography of both foods and their settings create a palpable trace of perfection.

Italians also internalize the notion of "food perfection" associated with products from specific regions. Early in my research Pino was trying to teach me about *prosciutti*; we had tasted two hams, and he had asked me if I could detect which pig had been fed a diet of wild acorns (it was a deeper taste—slightly bitter?). The hams were, of course, succulent, but I was having a hard time understanding what makes one ham stand out over the rest.

Pino tells me, "This is the typical region of the ham. In Italy we have two regions known for ham. One is Emilia, and Parma is in Emilia, and the other is in Trentino in the Alps. But Parma's ham is the best." (Patrizia corrects Pino, "The second-best ham is San Daniele from Friuli!")

"But there are pigs in all parts of Italy," I say. "I don't understand . . . why are these special? Do people all over Italy understand that this is where the best ham is from?"

Pino: "Yes, sure."

"Is it more expensive?"

"Yes, absolutely. It's like the *parmigiano*. Everywhere in Italy—south Italy, north Italy—people know that the best one comes from this region. Maybe people say it's a question of weather—the humidity of the air, water, I don't know what."

I say, "I can understand that for making milk and cheese, but what about a pig? A pig is a pig, right?"

"Excuse me?"

"A pig is a pig, right?"

"Yes, a pig is a pig," Pino says, "but it depends on what the pig eats, where the pig grew up, what kind of air it breathes. . . . You know what? People say in Italy you can buy coffee in Naples and prepare it in Bologna, but this coffee won't have the same taste of the same coffee in Naples. People don't know why, maybe the water, maybe the air. I can't explain it, there is not a scientific explanation for that."

I show Pino a photo I have made of *prosciutti* hanging in a local shop.

Pino explains: "You must know that there are different kinds of hams. The quality of the ham depends on its aging. For a ham from the same pig, you can pay \$100 or \$1,000. No, \$1,000 is too much; \$100 to \$400, for example, for a whole ham. That's more or less the price. It depends on the aging, the time that the ham has been left to dry—in a cave or, now, in a modern stockhouse.

But the aging is very important, because they just don't leave it there. Don't think that they make the ham and leave in a dark place for one year, two years. No. They put the ham in place and every two months they taste, with a stick of wood."

"They stick a piece of wood into the ham?"

"Exactly. Then they stick it in and take it out. And they smell and taste it, and then they change the salt that covers the ham. Not all of the ham is covered, just part of it. They change this salt, and they add some fat, so it is treated. So it is not that a two-year-old ham means a ham has been left for two years by itself."

"Like a bottle of wine that was left for two years?"

"But neither is the wine simply left to age. If a bottle of wine is very old, it means that every month, or every two months, the owner of the wine cellar twists these bottles. 'Time' is not just time to wait. It's time to work. That is the reason a small piece of ham could cost fifteen dollars and another ham from the same region, from the same pig, can cost twice the amount. And the same goes for the cheese, *parmigiano*. It's tasted, it's moved, it's judged, for a long time. The ham you bought that we just ate was very good because you bought the typical ham of Parma and it was quite old."

I eventually learned to taste subtle differences between the hams we ate. I find myself using the inflated language of the Italian food writer, but this is just the point: you are drawn in; you take the distinctive excellence of these foods as immutable fact, and then you are willing to pay heavily to consume them as symbols as well as realities. Are the hams of Parma really distinctive over the hams of Piacenza, forty miles away? *Perché no?*

These fine hams must be operated upon by a home surgeon, not whacked apart or treated to the indignities of a machine.

"People say that using an electric blade to slice the ham is bad," Pino begins; "the friction between blade and ham produces heat—and this cooks the slice of ham a little. So people say that it's better to cut ham with a knife."

"Does it take some skill? The pieces of ham we ate today were very thinly sliced. Was it easy to cut it so thin?"

"You need a very long knife, a very sharp knife," Pino explained. "You have to cut it with just one pass, because if you use a short knife, you cut up and down, up and down. Cutting it that way, you are not able to cut it so thin. In fact, my father taught me to cut the ham in this way. He is a master. My family, many years ago, bought a machine for cutting ham, but they never use it. They say it's not the same. They prefer it cut by hand. And my father taught me to use the knife like a razor; the knife has to be like a razor, very sharp. You have to put your finger close to the edge of the slice and cut. You have to pay attention, because my father sometimes cut his finger with the ham. And

believe me, my slice is not as thin as my father's."

"Not so thin as your father's."

"Yeah," Pino says, "my father is incredibly skilled at that."

"If you go to a restaurant," he continues, "not upper-class, a good restaurant—in the kitchen you can see a table—a cutting board—with two arms they use as clamps. They put the ham in clamps where it is cut. You must remove the bone, and this is very difficult. My father is able to do it; I am not. He says it is 'like a surgeon in an operation, like a doctor.' You remove the bone but keep the ham . . ."

Doug: "In one piece."

Pino: "Exactly. And then you can cut the slices."

From this king of cured meats, expensive, delicate, eaten in almost transparent slices over melon or arranged for an appetizer, we move to—lard!

If one were to seek opposites in meaning, *ham* and *lard* would do well. Ham is made from the most prized piece of meat on the pig; lard is made from the fat that lies along the back of the animal. It is primarily used as a cooking grease, but it is considered unhealthy because of its cholesterol and calories. It would seem grotesque to eat it straight. Yet Bill Buford opens his study of Italian food worlds with the chef Mario Batali placing his privately cured lard into the mouths of his shocked American dinner guests.²⁹ He tells them that in his expensive restaurants he asks his wait staff to refer to it as "white *prosciutto*." And it has become a mini-rage.

We find in *lardo* the same process we have identified in *prosciutto*—that is, artisan production to refine a crude food, and a process of commodification that in this case includes a dizzying series of battles over symbols and meanings.

First, some history. *Lardo* was a traditional Italian cooking grease, but it lost favor when the Catholic calendar of lean days required a nonanimal fat (olive oil leapt to the fore), and as Italian cooking developed, olive oil in general came to be seen as the natural complement to pasta, wine, and vegetables. But in some specialized environments, due to residents' isolation and poverty, *lardo* occupied a special niche. The most important were the "marble villages" of Carrara in central Italy, and in particular Colonnata.³⁰ If you find Colonnata via Google Earth, you will see a tiny Italian village perched between two mountains, transformed over more than two thousand years into a white patchwork of marble quarries. In Roman times the marble was quarried with slave labor; since then local workers have performed the dangerous, arduous, and poorly paid work.

The marble villages are in steep mountains where there is no arable land for crops and no pasture for sheep from which cheese could be made. In the dense

forests, however, there was natural forage for pigs: chestnuts and acorns. Villagers grew pigs and learned over hundreds of years to cure the pig fat—*lardo*—using the local marble and herbs. To hold the curing lard they made containers from marble (called *conche*, from *conca*—bowl). Because the marble is porous, the *conche* allowed the fat to breathe. The lard was layered with salt and local herbs, including garlic, pepper, rosemary, and juniper berries. As the lard cured, the water dripped away, making it receptive to the oils in the herbs, and after six months or more the *lardo* had become fragrant and cool, a reportedly delicious ingredient in the workers' sandwiches of bread and onion. For centuries *lardo di Colonnata* provided cheap calories for hardworking people and was otherwise ignored. When anthropologist Alison Leitch was doing research on the marble quarry workers in the late 1980s, *lardo* was frequently mentioned in oral history interviews but never served to her. However, it subsequently became the featured food in local food festivals, called *sagre* (*sagra* means *fiesta cittadina* or town festival), which are now common destinations for Italian tourists. In these festivals it is typical to feature local foods that may have disappeared from common use but have a special place in the regional memory. Leitch tells us that these often embody memories of poverty—foods such as pancakes made from chestnut flour, for example. *Lardo di Colonnata* embodied the regional memory of very hardworking and very poor quarry workers, and consuming the food reenacted the identity of a region.

All was well and good until *lardo* suddenly became an exotic food featured in international food writing. Thereupon it attracted the attention of European Community food inspectors, who for a time closed down *lardo* production because of allegedly unsanitary conditions: curing in dank cellars with dirt floors. The *conche* had been used for hundreds of years, but the porous material was officially unacceptable as a curing rack. EU regulations called for tiled floors, adequate bathroom facilities, and nonporous materials in the curing process. The battle raged, Italy versus the European Union.

We shift our discussion now to certification—the creation of labels that define the status of particular foods and contested labels, which *lardo di Colonnata* became. In the case of *prosciutto*, admired royalty of hams, situated in the lush lowlands of the best agricultural lands of Italy, the claim for protected status with the legal classification “Denominazione d’Origine Protetta” (DOP) was natural. The classification means that the pigs made into the designated *prosciutti* have to be raised in the region and the meats must be produced there as well. DOP certification is a badge of quality, recognized throughout Italy and increasingly on a global level. It is the Gucci label that allows for the consumption of a sign made meaningful by the assumption that the quality of the object it is attached to is distinctive.

The transformation of *lardo* into a consumable sign has been more complicated. As Leitch tells us, it was first elevated to a marker of cultural memory through the food festival system, and as it became threatened by European Community regulations the Slow Food movement adopted it as an “endangered food.” (The endangerment of various foods comes about because of overfishing, mono-agriculture, and legal challenges to traditional production methods.) As the Slow Food movement became involved, *lardo di Colonnata* became a site for cultural warfare: nationalists in Italy took on the rationalizing logic of the massive EU bureaucracy. In the end *lardo di Colonnata* became so famous that far-flung Italian butchers saw a euro to be made and began to market their own, non-marble-cured lard as *di Colonnata*. The residents of the village were forced to copyright the name and reserve it for their own use. The tale becomes even more complex: local proponents of *lardo* sought DOP protection, but their pigs have become so scarce and the *lardo* so popular that they are now imported from the Bologna region. Because the pigs must be local, their *lardo* is not eligible for DOP status, and to rub salt in the wound, the Slow Food movement began to market several varieties of *lardo* through its favored supermarket chain. The locally cured pork fat did win an exception to the EU ruling (based primarily on the fact that it employs a centuries-old method that, while not hygienic by scientific reasoning, is hygienic in practice), and the symbols that have swirled around this strange food have settled back to being important symbols of cultural memory.

We go on at some length about this because Italian food has become fetishized in Italy as well as globally. What is on one hand an appreciation for genuine difference (and quality) can be and is easily transformed into a mad rush for a symbol that may not have anything to do with the object it symbolizes. In Italy, the consumption of labels in the fashion and automotive industries may manifest the most advanced form of this cultural pattern in the world.

Buford tells an interesting story about his apprenticeship with a Tuscan butcher that reinforces our point. Tuscany itself is the most fetishized place in Italy, and of the foods there, the steak is the most prized. One can go so far to say that the famous beefsteak (*bistecca*) is the symbolic center of Tuscan food, like *prosciutto* and *parmigiano* are for Emilia-Romagna. Buford apprenticed himself to a famous Tuscan butcher and learned that from the butcher’s perspective the modern breeding and feeding practices have ruined the famous breed of cattle, the *Chianina*, that is supposed to be the source of the steak. Tourists and locals alike stream to his famous shop to buy the most famous beefsteak of Italy, but they are, in fact, buying meat secretly shipped into Tuscany, in the predawn darkness, from artisan producers in Spain.⁸¹ The consumption of the symbol *bistecca di Toscana* becomes myth rather than reality.

Our local *prosciutto*, however, lives up to its fearsome reputation; we'll have it sliced very thin and laid over our fresh melon; we'll skip the lard, whatever its current meaning, for now.

FORMAGGIO

We have examined Italian foods harvested from natural environments and cultivated crops and foods changed through processes such as curing. Our last category takes another step in complexity: a food created when raw material is transformed by a natural process—milk into cheese or grape juice into wine. We'll focus on cheese, and in particular the signature cheese of Emilia-Romagna, along with *prosciutto* the most Bolognese of tastes in a rich culinary culture: *parmigiano reggiano*.

For those of us who grew up shaking salty, dry Kraft Parmesan out of green cardboard cylinders onto our spaghetti, this is a startling cheese. You don't make sandwiches out of it, and aside from nibbling it as an antipasti, you seldom eat it straight up. Rather it enters sauces, meat dishes, and myriad other niches in the Bolognese cuisine. It is distinctive, dry, and grainy, a pale and daunting cheese that makes friends only if you know your business.

Cheese is made when a foreign substance, rennet, is introduced into milk as a coagulant and the resulting lumpy liquid is subsequently pressed, partially dried, and aged. Like several processes we've examined, this is simple on the surface but complex underneath.

Much of the specialness of locally produced cheese, no matter the country of origin, results from the use of locally grown ingredients and traditional methods. For example, specific rennets, combined with the milk of specific breeds of cows or sheep, produce cheeses with distinctive tastes and characteristics. Different breeds of cattle, sheep, or goat produce milk with different percentages of butter fat, protein level, and other characteristics, and the taste is also affected by the animals' diets. When cows or sheep pasture on fields that contain high amounts of wild garlic, the milk will carry a hint of bitterness, which will be passed on to cheeses or yogurts made from that milk. Similarly, when the hay contains wildflowers, the milk will carry those tastes and smells. These animal breeds, local crops, and techniques develop over centuries, so cheeses from villages just a few miles apart may have different tastes and character.

I write from the perspective of having lived for sixteen years in a dairy farm neighborhood in northern New York, which I studied for several years.³² The small family dairies (averaging about eighty cows) all sold their milk to large companies, who carted it away on a daily basis. The farmers had no involve-

ment in the making of their bulk milk into pasteurized milk, butter, or cheese. The system, which previously had produced a distinctive local cheese, now produced cheeses for a mass market, essentially indistinguishable from cheeses made anywhere in the United States.

From the current perspective, the farms I studied were remnants of an obsolete small-scale family farm system. The American agricultural system, driven by an ideology and logic of mass production, is best represented by the one thousand cow milk factories of Florida, Texas, and California. They do not grow cattle feed; there are no fields on which to spread the enormous quantities of manure the animals produce. The cows are bred for production, milked three times a day, and killed after one or two milking cycles—that is, after one or two years. The cheese produced with the milk from these milk factories is bland and unassuming, dyed to produce a fake difference, and packaged in plastic for shipping. Much of it makes its way into prepared foods, cheese-product snacks, or toppings for the pizza industry, where it is notable for its gooiness and abundance.

How do Italians produce something as different as *parmigiano* when, in fact, they start with the same raw materials: cows, feed, milk, and rennet? To explain this we draw from a study by Kees de Roest and Alberto Menghi³⁸ as well as our observations and informal interviews in Bologna. The case of *parmigiano* production shows how a distinctive and high-quality cheese comes into existence and provides lessons American agriculturalists might consider.

The roots of *parmigiano* are seven hundred years old. First created by Benedictine monks in the thirteenth century, near the town of Reggio, the technique was perfected and protected as a distinctive tradition. It is praised in medieval cookbooks and has been recognized since that time as an important element in the cuisine of Emilia-Romagna. It was the first Italian food to receive a special designation when in 1934 the Voluntary Consortium of Typical Grana was set up to protect the cheese. The consortium was discontinued during World War II but reintroduced in 1954 as the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano, which still exists. It defines the production region as the provinces immediately northwest of Bologna, including the towns of Parma, Reggio, Modena, and Mantova. In the meantime *parmigiano* has been given official recognition by the European Community as a Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PDI) product. Thus the cheese has an official classification that ensures its quality. It is also a symbol that, as we have argued in the case of *prosciutto*, takes on a certain life of its own. To consume these cheeses is to consume a guaranteed marker of Italian cultural excellence.

There is an alternative to *parmigiano reggiano*, marketed as *grana padano*, produced with more industrial methods. The farms that produce the *grana*

padano are much larger; cows are fed silage, there are fewer controls over the cheese manufacture, and the cheeses are aged for shorter periods of time. Some *grana padano* farms are in Emilia-Romagna and others in Lombardy. The success of *parmigiano reggiano* depends on a public that perceives its quality as sufficiently important to pay for it. Critical to this is a regional cuisine, also developed over hundreds of years, in which the local *parmigiano* is a critical element. Review the dinners described in this book; *parmigiano* is almost always there. *Parmigiano reggiano* imparts a characteristic taste of the region, yet because it is used as an adjunct to dishes rather than a dish itself, its importance may seem unusual.

We have a distinctive product with centuries of tradition and an appreciative public with a cuisine that needs it. What in the actual production makes this cheese special? Here I find myself comparing the cheese system of *parmigiano reggiano* with the farmers I studied in northern New York. They were an anonymous part of a very large system, shipping their milk to a distant factory. How and why is the *parmigiano* system different?

There are several aspects to the cheese production that stand out. While most of the seven thousand-plus farmers who are part of the *parmigiano* system use Friesian cattle, these have been used in Italy for only a hundred years; the breed is only three hundred years old in any case, so the ancient roots of *parmigiano* are not in the cow that produces the milk.

The difference in quality more likely begins with the feed. The Benedictines owned large tracts of land, and their cows pastured on clover and lucerne. The cows on dairy farms in New York are fed fermented corn silage and some locally grown hay; in Florida dairy cows are fed organic waste from the local orange industry. Since the “mad cow” crisis, there has been great controversy over cow feed used in other parts of Europe and the United States that contained contaminated brain and organ meat—we’ve made our cows into cannibals! But not in Italy.

On *parmigiano* farms the cows can be fed only locally grown hay, in addition to a specified amount of what farmers call concentrates, cereals that contain necessary nutrients to balance animal diets. The cows are pastured; they have a nice life walking around during the day munching on alfalfa and other grasses. Cows in many large American dairies are never allowed to leave free-stall barns, where they lived in crowded conditions, polluted by their manure.

Only the milk produced during the crop-growing season, May to November, is used for *parmigiano*. Unpasteurized raw milk from the evening milking is let stand overnight (the cleanliness of the whole system is critical); the cream is skimmed in the morning, and the skimmed milk is added to the fresh milk from the morning milking. In this way it is “partially skimmed.” It is then



“Worker at Parma Cheese Factory Storing Cheese for Aging in a Room, Parma, Italy, 1950.” (Original caption.) Photographer: Philip Gendreau. The methods pictured are consistent with current practices: the worker in the foreground is cleaning the cheese, which is done weekly. The aging cheese rests on wooden shelves, also cleaned regularly. Freshly made cheese wheels (foreground, right) await their brine bath. The master grader, dressed like an office worker, thumps the cheese to judge its quality. The graders spend twelve years apprenticing.



Parmigiano (background) and *grana padano* (foreground). Note the price difference. *Grana padano* is made on industrial farms adjoining the *parmigiano* areas, as well as in Lombardy. Patrizia said that their main difference, from her perspective, is that the *parmigiano* is aged longer and thus lasts in the refrigerator for up to a month. On one hand *grana padano* threatens the existence of *parmigiano* because it is a close approximation of the cheese and considerably less expensive. The shopper likely does not know about the differing production methods and the different ecological aspects of the two systems of production. But on the other hand, Italians' respect and love for *parmigiano* seem to assure its place in the contemporary world of Italian food.

heated in large copper kettles that can only be a specific size. The heating is carefully monitored; starter is added from the previous day's whey (the liquid remaining after milk has been curdled), and the only rennet permitted is from calf stomachs.

The curd is formed through heating and stirring with a several-foot-wide whisk called a *spinatura*. When the correct acidity is reached, the stirring stops, and the curd settles to the bottom of the kettle. It is then removed and drained on cheesecloth, formed into wheels, "branded" with identifying information as to date of manufacture, and, a few days later, immersed in a brine solution (the salt concentration of the nearby sea) for four weeks. One hundred fifty gallons of milk have been used to make a cheese wheel that will weigh about eighty pounds and sell for about six hundred dollars.

The cheese must be properly aged to become *parmigiano*. Aging takes place in “ripening firms” or in curing rooms in the dairies themselves. The cheeses are aged for an average of two years, some for longer periods. Aging breaks proteins into their amino acid components, and some of these re-form as the small crystals one finds in excellent *parmigiano*. The cheeses are turned once a week, and at this time the cheeses and shelves are cleaned. Traditionally this was done by hand; in modern ripening plants these steps have been automated.

After a year, the cheeses are inspected by a master grader who thunks them with a small hammer, looking for evidence of hollows. Sometimes a tiny hole is bored into the center of the cheese and the core is tasted. The cheeses that pass are again branded, and those that fail are stripped of their previous branding, to be sold as an inferior grade.

This craft process creates what many call the most important agricultural product of Italy. De Roest and Menghi make the point that the *parmigiano* system depends upon a culture of like-minded actors at different parts of the production chain (farmers, cheesemakers, and ripeners). The contracts are informal, and farmers have generations-long relationships with dairies, which are usually cooperatively owned. Prices are determined by common understanding rather than competitive bidding. The result is a stable system that reflects what the participants regard as a fair division of economic rewards.

The scale of operation and ecological factors in the *parmigiano* system are important. The average *parmigiano* farm is about twenty acres in size, and the average herd size (200,000 cows on about seven thousand farms) is around thirty.⁸⁴ Judging from my months spent on dairy farms, I expect that the small size of these farms is an important factor in their success. Farmers know individual animals and keep them for up to a decade. Their health is monitored when they are milked daily. The small farms are much easier to keep clean; manure is mixed with bedding and removed daily, to be spread on fields.

The *parmigiano* farms need more workers than nearby industrial farms do, but the cost of doing business on the *parmigiano* farms is lower due to environmental factors that are built into the system. For example, alfalfa grown on *parmigiano* farms makes excellent cattle feed, and the alfalfa is also a nitrogen-fixing plant that restores the soil. De Roest and Menghi note the lesser use of fertilizer on the *parmigiano* farms as a result. Corn, used for silage on dairy farms seeking the greatest production per acre (whether in the United States or Italy), requires more fertilizer use because it is a “heavy feeder” on soil nutrients. Finally, the whey produced in *parmigiano* production has been the traditional food of the pigs made into the regional *prosciutto*.

These are, we believe, the explanations for the specialness of this quintessential ingredient in the Bolognese cuisine. We grind some off our block to add to our sauce and most certainly add a few slivers to our *antipasti* platter.

FOOD FROM THE FACTORY

We have the elements for our meal, and perhaps we should stop there. But it is a real world that provides the context for the Italian foods we've described, so let's place it into the larger context.

Throughout the United States and much of Europe (the United Kingdom especially) there is extensive use of what we'll call prepared foods. The most simple version is frozen; the most complex is "manufactured." Are these common in Italy?

Patrizia asked Lucia if she used already-prepared food.

Lucia: "Nothing."

"Frozen food?"

"Nothing."

"Not even the vegetables?"

"No," Lucia said, "just the spinach when it is not the season, or the peas, and nothing else."

"Not even in the minestrone?"

"No. The family is a bit difficult. I have to take something of this and something of that and wash everything. They don't want frozen food."

Franco adds, "If she put some leftovers in the freezer . . . yes, they are good, but they lose a lot, to us."

Patrizia says, laughing, "To me you are prejudiced!"

But Franco is not persuaded. "No, look . . . if I eat a dish of tortellini coming out of the freezer, and I didn't know it came from the freezer, I say, 'Why are they not as good as usual?'"

"One year I tried," Lucia says, "because I said, 'Is it possible everybody else freezes them and I can't?' So I made more tortellini than usual, and I put some of them in the freezer. And after a month, more or less, I cooked these tortellini and everybody said to me, 'Mom, where did you get these tortellini? They are not the ones you make!'"

Franco adds, "The lasagna too loses its taste."

"In the lasagna," Lucia says, "the *parmigiano* becomes too soft, but even if the taste is a little different—if it could be better—we eat it. Anyway, since now I have the time I generally cook fresh food."

Most certainly the fish cannot be frozen; absolutely, "the family won't have it!"

We asked Barbara and Carlo the same question: "Do you buy frozen food or already prepared food?"

Barbara: "Almost nothing frozen or prepared."

Carlo: "Just frozen vegetables, but a few."

Barbara: "Yes, some vegetables. But no prepared food."

And to Side, who makes most of her food from raw ingredients:

Patrizia: "Do you buy frozen food?"

Side: "No, we don't like frozen food."

Patrizia: "And precooked food?"

Side: "No, no! We make everything."

To Giorgio and Bassano—and Dani and Marina agreed:

Patrizia: "Do you buy frozen or precooked food?"

Giorgio: "Some frozen food, never precooked food."

Dani: "We do not buy precooked food either. Sometimes some frozen vegetables."

Patrizia: "Already seasoned?"

Dani: "No, no, just a mix of cut vegetables."

Giorgio: "For us the same, not seasoned frozen food."

Clearly some frozen food finds its way into Italian freezers but few fully prepared dinners. Around the globe, meanwhile, food is increasingly mass-produced as raw materials such as potatoes are reduced to their generic elements including glucose, vegetable protein, and starch and reconstituted with chemical additives to become new forms of old foods—such as margarine or artificial sweeteners—or new food entirely, such as synthetic meat. Is this brave new world of food entirely missing from the Italian culinary landscape?

We'll ask the question by way of comparison between a pizza made in the craft mode of production, served at your local pizzeria in Naples, and a mass-produced pizza purchased in the United States. The Neapolitan pizza is made from flour from local wheat, tomatoes, garlic, and olive oil from regional sources, all local and fresh. The topping might be anchovies caught in the Mediterranean, salami made locally, or possibly *mozzarella di bufala* from the animals raised just to the south. This is craft-made food, the ingredients largely unadulterated by industrial manufacture. The pizza maker is a local figure, spinning his dough into an irregular circle and throwing it casually into a nine-hundred-degree wood-fired oven to emerge in three to four minutes as a masterpiece.

We compare our Neapolitan pizza to a Totino's pizza found in my local American supermarket. It is an eight-inch pizza (suggested two servings) that sells for two dollars. It contains the following substances (as listed on the package):



Pizza for Big Americans, Bologna supermarket, 2006. The manufactured foods and additives in these pizzas are essentially the same as those listed on a contemporary American pizza, but completely different from those made for normal-sized Italians.

enriched flour (wheat flour, niacin, ferrous sulfate, thiamin, mononitrate, riboflavin, folic acid); water; tomatoes (water, tomato paste); mozzarella cheese substitute (water, partially hydrogenated soybean oil, casein, potato starch, vital wheat gluten, sodium aluminum phosphate, salt, potassium chloride, citric acid, potassium sorbate, sodium phosphate, sodium citrate, titanium dioxide, maltodextrin, magnesium oxide, zinc oxide, vitamin A palmitate, riboflavin, vitamin B12); pepperoni (pork, beef, salt, water, dextrose, lactic acid starter culture, oleoresin of paprika, sodium nitrite, BHA and BHT and citric acid; may also include spice, beef stock, garlic powder, natural flavor, natural smoke flavoring); partially hydrogenated soybean oil; rehydrated pasteurized process nonfat mozzarella cheese (water, nonfat milk, cheese cultures, salt, enzymes, citric acid, vitamin A palmitate, vitamin B12, sodium aluminum phosphate, sodium citrate, sodium phosphate); sugar, modified corn starch, salt, dry yeast, soy flour; rehydrated enzyme modified cheese (water, milk, cheese cultures, salt, enzymes); natural flavor, dextrose, monocalcium phosphate, spice, baking soda, beet powder, xanthan gum, red pepper, sorbitan monostearate.

A serving (which is about a third of what most Americans would eat) of Totino's contains 380 calories, of which 200 are derived from fat. One could easily consume most of one's caloric needs for a day with a pizza and a supersized soft drink, with very high levels of fat and corn syrup.

About this food Peter Atkins and Ian Bowler write: "About 3800 additives are used in our daily food, for three basic purposes. First there are cosmetic chemicals that make products look more attractive . . . especially coloring agents, flavors, sweeteners and texture modifiers, such as emulsifiers and stabilizers. Second there are preservatives, including antioxidants and sequestrants, which add life to a product. Third, processing aids assist the manufacturing process, for instance by preventing food from sticking to machinery."³⁵

Are these additives unhealthy? "A small but significant group of people are allergic to individual or groups of additives. . . . Tartrazine has . . . been linked to hyperactivity in children who consume it in fish fingers cakes, sauces, soft drinks or marzipan. It is banned in Norway and Finland but not in the UK. Such allergic reactions can be sudden and dramatic, but perhaps even more worrying is the unknown and insidious long-term effect that food additives and chemical residues may have."³⁶

Manufacturing food by reconstituting elements (the mozzarella in Totino's American pizza) is not entirely missing, however, from the Italian food landscape. In 2006 I studied two supermarkets in Bologna, looking specifically for frozen or prepared food. There was a bit of frozen food in one small case. These were primarily frozen vegetables, frozen stuffed pastas (mostly ravioli), and frozen pizzas. There were components of a dinner (breaded fish, for example) but no frozen dinners on the U.S. model. I looked more carefully at the frozen pizzas; the listed ingredients were flour, tomatoes, olive oil, and a single topping, for example, spinach. Then it caught my eye: a pizza made for "Big Americans"! It was the only pizza in the case made of manufactured foods—an artificial cheese created from basic elements, for example. The pizza contained nearly the same list of ingredients and additives as the Totino's described previously. Rather than the single topping typical of an Italian pizza, the pie for big Americans had seven toppings competing for space. It was made in Milan but bound for the global market.

Italians search for quality foods in the wild or in shops and markets, and they cook them with care. They eat mostly at home, surrounded by family and friends. In these ways Italians remain separate from the increasingly pervasive international system of processed and manufactured foods, eaten on the run as fast food or popped into the microwave for a home-cooked variety.

The new history of Italian food may describe reborn consciousness regarding local food production, chemical use, genetic manipulation and other issues of industrial agriculture, bundled into what is now called the Slow Food movement.³⁷ The challenge for Italy will be to integrate the plentiful food of the modern world with sensibilities consistent with an earlier era.



"Boys in Boat Served Coffee at St. Mark's Square. In the square noted for coffee sippers just passing time of day, a change of scene takes place with the seasonal high tides. Two young Italian boys standing in a flatkeep boat stop to be served a cup of coffee at the famed St. Mark's Square in the canal city of Venice. In the mist-veiled background, St. Mark's Basilica and Campanile are seen across the inundated plaza." 1963, photographer unknown.

Food Combinations, Meal Sequence, & Bodily Well-Being

PATRIZIA: “WHEN YOU EAT PASTA, DO YOU ALSO HAVE A SECOND DISH?”

Side: “I would like to have pasta as the only dish. But if Marco does not also eat the second dish, it seems to him as he did not eat at all.”

Italians believe they know what foods combine properly, the order in which food should be eaten, and how the body properly digests food. These assumptions create a structure for integrating food into daily life, and we study both the forms of this structure and the typical ways Italians improvise alternative versions. We are interested in why these structures exist, and while there can be no definitive answer, we have several ideas that seem plausible.

We begin with the notion that very old theories—codified by the second-century philosopher Claudius Galen—were so influential in Italy as to have left a “cultural residue” in the contemporary culture. Galen was a figure of extraordinary importance who synthesized virtually all Greek and Roman medical and philosophical thought, into a new body of theory. He was educated as a doctor and trained in Rome as a trauma surgeon, gaining practical experience by treating wounded gladiators. His vivisections on great apes led him to retheorize how the circulatory system worked (it had been thought that air circulated through the veins and arteries). His fame led him to the post of physician to Marcellus Aurelius and his son Commodus. But mostly Galen was an intellectual who integrated medicine, philosophy, and gastronomy into a system of knowledge that dominated European thought for fifteen hundred years.¹

Galen’s concepts of balance and equilibrium defined not only illness and health but also the overall mechanisms and principles of the natural world.

Our evidence of the continued influence of Galenic ideas is found in modern Italians' orientation toward ingestion, digestion, and the "proper" way to eat to preserve health, as well as in Italians' continued preoccupation with food combinations and meal sequence. We cannot say that Italians still consciously operate in a Galenic universe, but the universe they occupy looks remarkably like the one defined by Galen in the second century.

We also suggest that the structure of Italian meals comes from long-ingrained religious habits. As we noted previously, once Italy became Christian in the fourth century, the ecclesiastical calendar established rules for eating represented in the obligations of penitential days and feast occasions, or, simply put, the "lean" and "fat" days. At the height of Christian influence, most Italians followed these rules for alternating diets (and there were nearly the same number of penitential and feast days) far beyond eliminating meats from fast days. The system necessitated two entirely distinct diets, down to alternative cooking oils. Lard, made of animal fat, was prohibited on lean days, which led to the use of olive oil throughout the Christian world. The effect of the lean and feast days throughout the year required complicated planning and food preparation; food use became serious rather than casual, integrated as it was into the web of religious life. While the power of the liturgical calendar to define the daily life of Italians waned with the growing secularization of Italy, we suggest that the "habit of structure" continues to influence Italian receptiveness to rule-bound eating practices.

We conclude our theorizing with an analysis of the latent functions of the formal structuring of Italian eating, showing how behavior toward food creates the particularly Italian social existence and protects diners from "dangerous" foods such as sugar and alcohol. The result of these various and peculiar memories and practices is the essential Italian food mind, the merging of body and culture.

FOOD COMBINATIONS

Food combinations are building blocks of recipes and menus, built on taken-for-granted assumptions about what foods naturally taste right in combination. Food combinations are elements of structure and as such form the basis of Italian cuisine.

We share culture with people who see these matters in the same way, and we tend to disdain those who do not. This is shown in a passage from Stanley Tucci's 1996 film *Big Night*.² In this film two brothers (Primo and Secondo) are Italian immigrants trying to make a success of an authentic Italian restaurant in 1950s America. The imagination of Italian culture in the

United States at that time was built around Dean Martin (*Volare!*), Sophia Loren or Gina Lollobrigida (voluptuousness!), crazily fast and impractical cars (Ferrari!), and Italian cuisine transformed into American diets (pizza!). Indeed, around the corner from Primo and Secondo's mostly deserted restaurant is their competitor's Americanized Italian restaurant, a raging success. The film asks why these two restaurants have fared so differently. The key scene, below, comes down to the American public's unwillingness to accept Italian definitions of proper food combinations.

The older brother, Primo, has finished preparing a dish of risotto for an American couple, the only patrons on a typical night. He says to his brother (Secondo), proud of his preparation: "Wait, the risotto." He sprinkles herbs over the dish.

The customer, an American woman, is smoking. The dish arrives: "Oh, thank god. I'm just so hungry!" She looks at her dish and then at her husband's; he remarks: "Looks good, you got leafs with yours."

She says to Secondo, clearly disappointed in her food: "Sir, is this what I ordered?"

Secondo answers, "It's a special recipe that my brother and I bring from Italy. It's delicious, I promise."

She is laughing but impatient: "Did you go all the way back to Italy to get it?"

Secondo ignores her, stands above her husband: "Do you want fresh pepper or cheese?"

Husband: "Cheese. And more!"

The wife faces Secondo: "Excuse me, didn't you say this was going to be rice with seafood?"

Secondo: "Yes, it is Italian arborio rice—the best! . . . and shrimp, and scallop . . ."

Wife: "I see. I just don't see anything that looks like a shrimp, or a scallop . . . I'm just . . . I'm disappointed . . . it's just not what I expected. . . . But I get a side order of spaghetti with this, right?"

Secondo: "Well, no."

Husband interrupts: "All main courses come with spaghetti, right?"

Secondo explains, patiently, "You see, risotto is rice. It is a starch. It doesn't go, really, with pasta."

Husband, impatiently: "Order a side of spaghetti, that's all! . . . and I'll eat your meatballs!"

Secondo: "The spaghetti comes without meatballs."

Wife: "There are no meatballs with the spaghetti?"

Secondo: "No, sometimes spaghetti likes to be alone!"



Paying the bill in a trattoria in Rome

The wife is unimpressed: “All right, then I guess we’ll also have a side order of meatballs! Okay, we’ll just have a side order of spaghetti!”

Secondo goes to the kitchen and tries to convince his brother to cook the spaghetti. Primo asks, “For whom?” Secondo won’t tell. Primo insists: “I want to know for whom it is for!”

Finally Secondo answers: “For the lady with the risotto!”

“What? Why???”

“I don’t know! She likes starch!”

“Bitch!”

Secondo says, “I make it myself; come on!”

“Back!!!” Primo yells at his brother. “Who are these people in America! . . . I need to talk to her!”

“Oh please, Primo, what are you going to do, tell the customer what she can eat? That’s what she wants. That’s what the customer asked for. Make it, make it, make it! Make the pasta, let’s go!”

“How can she want that? They both are a starch! I should make a mashed potato for on the other side!”

This episode is both entertaining and tragic, for it foretells the failure of their restaurant due to an American audience's unwillingness or inability to appreciate authentic Italian food culture and the unwillingness of Italian immigrants to transform their culture to fit American tastes.

But the essential message is that in Italian food culture one eats one starch in a meal, not two. There is no real reason behind this principle. In fact Italians violate it when they make *gnocchi* (pasta dough) stuffed with potato, and pizza is popular with a potato topping. But a single starch—typically pasta or rice—is the foundation of a meal and leads naturally to a dish of meat or fish. There can be only one foundation.

The passage from the film also says that for Italians the quality of the food is more important than the quantity. Risotto captures the essence—the taste and smell—of seafood but does not include discernible pieces of fish. For the Americans this was (at least at that moment in our history) unacceptable. They want more, more! Side dishes, more side dishes, more grated cheese on top of foods where to the Italian it does not belong. The Americans are corpulent and the Italians are slim. The Americans are all-you-can-eat eating machines in a cultural universe tuned to a different channel.

The American customers (and, for many decades, Americans in general) also have a strong sense of what goes together in Italian food—spaghetti and meatballs. This combination does not exist in Italy, however, because meatballs made from beef are uncommon, and in regions where there are sufficient cows to slaughter, such as Emilia-Romagna, the pasta is egg based. The closest thing to spaghetti and meatballs is *ragù*, a Bolognese tomato and carrot sauce that includes a modest amount of finely ground beef and pork. *Ragù*, for an Italian, goes only with *tagliatelle*, a flat pasta made with egg. Spaghetti is a southern food and is typically associated with pork, or more often simply with tomato sauce, but certainly never with beef. In fact, *pasta alla Napoletana*—from Naples, one or two or three traditional centers of spaghetti production—is a spaghetti served with *ragù* made with ground pork and diced salami.

The attitudes that go with these practices are deeply ingrained. With his uncle in Toronto, Pino visited an Italian restaurant that had gone over to the dark side: spaghetti and meatballs. Pino told us that his uncle, fully acculturated, had urged him: “Try it, it’s really not bad!” So Pino said, “‘Why not?—I’ll give it a try!’ They brought the spaghetti and meatballs . . . they don’t look right; they don’t smell right. I take a bite: they don’t taste right—honest, I could not eat them!”

I ask several of Patrizia's friends, who are eating dinner at her home, to explain the Italian sense of proper food combinations.

Rita answered, "It is a matter of putting together tastes. It's not good to eat *tagliatelle* with *ragù* and to drink Coca-Cola!"

"Not for you, Rita," Isabella interjected. "Maybe it is okay for an American!"

"It is impossible for me," Rita says. "Once an American basketball player, Sugar Ray Richardson, came to Bologna, and as soon as he arrived he did a press conference in a famous Bolognese restaurant. And everybody was getting *tagliatelle* with *ragù*. And Sugar Ray was about to dump ketchup on his and I yelled *noooooooooo!*"

Isabella adds, "In France they can give you a quarter of a chicken with a side of spaghetti. For me this is horrible. But if I go to a Chinese restaurant I can eat chicken with noodles, and, of course, this is okay. In each cuisine there is a way to do things correctly, differently from our way. So if you give me noodles with chicken a certain way, I expect that—and, naturally, I like it. But when I am in Italy I try to respect the rules of the Italian cuisine."

"In the Chinese cuisine," Patrizia says, "the noodles, which are like spaghetti, are part of the tradition and typically served in that way. In France, spaghetti is not part of the tradition. They are taken from Italy and used in an inappropriate way. You could say it the same way: the appetizer of the Chinese restaurant is a spring roll, and you have to put soy sauce on it. You can't imagine putting ketchup on it. It is the same to put ketchup on spaghetti. If you take a hamburger, it is a good taste, the ketchup. Rita says that it is a matter of combination of flavors that is our tradition. We have in Italy the *nouvelle cuisine* that is based on strange combinations, based on trying new tastes. But the *nouvelle cuisine* has not had a great success. Usually the chefs who experiment with *nouvelle cuisine* are very good cooks, Italian cooks. They experiment on the basis of their deep knowledge of Italian food, which they know very well. But they have not drawn a large following."

As certain as cultural insiders are about food combinations, some of them, to an outsider, are simply peculiar. For example, Italians seldom drink beer (and almost never recreationally), but in the pizzeria they drink beer or cola only. Wine and pizza is simply not acceptable. Why? The answer is, at first, an arbitrary rule of culture:

I ask Isabella, "What if you order Prosecco [an Italian champagne] to drink with your pizza?"

Isabella, without pause: "It wouldn't taste good!"

"Okay, what if I say I want to have Amarone [a red wine of high quality] with my pizza?"

"Of course you can do what you want!" Isabella says.

"But everybody would think I was crazy, right?"

"Ah . . . yes! For some reason, wine is not right . . . for some reason wine with pizza is not good! I mean, when you try it you will see."

In the discussion that follows, food combinations are explained as the basis of digestion. In a logic reminiscent of Galen, foods are combined to produce appealing dishes, which produces appetite—the signal that the body desires the foods to produce balance—and the pleasure produced by eating indicates that proper digestion has taken place.

Patrizia asks an assembled dinner party: "Please comment for Harper: beer or wine with pizza?"

Clara, says, "Beer. Because, in my opinion, it is a taste association that is universally known, that is: with pizza beer is better than wine."

Patrizia asks, "Did you ever experiment, such as one day, 'Well, today I feel like wine with pizza. A white pizza, white wine; a red pizza, red wine'?"

Clara answers, "No, never!"

Her husband, Gigi, adds, laughing, "What a weird idea!"

Pino, also laughing: "And over pizza with buffalo mozzarella you should drink milk!"

But Patrizia asks them, "Please, reflect on this: what does your answer tell us about Italian habits in general?"

At first Clara explains with culture: "Well, I think we have more traditions than Americans. And taste is the result of a tradition. We don't eat pizza with wine—it's our tradition—while, for example, meat and pasta call for the wine; they don't call for the beer."

"Anyway," Gigi says, "while on rare occasions you might drink beer with meat or pasta, there is no possibility of drinking wine with pizza."

Pino adds, "The beer also serves to digest the pizza, because the pizza is a brick!"

"And for digestion," Clara concludes, "the Coke is better!"

Behind these exchanges are the ideas that carbonation in cola or beer aids digestion (but carbonated wines, like Prosecco, don't) and that pizza is hard to digest. But Italian pizzas are very light, with a thin crust, moderate amounts of tomato sauce, a single topping, and a light serving of cheese. To an outsider, this hardly seems like a "brick"! Indeed, a pizza is a different construction of the same foods—wheat, tomato, cheese, and vegetables or small amounts of meat—that are otherwise formed into pasta, sauce, and *contorni*, believed to be easily digested, and with biblical certainty are accompanied by wine and, most certainly, never beer!

EXPLAINING COMBINATIONS

Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari noted the impact of Galenic ideas throughout the medieval period into the early modern era, and as we searched for explanations for this aspect of Italian food culture it seemed reasonable to extend their arguments to the present. At the basis of Galen's system is the belief that "every living thing—human, animal or vegetable—possessed a particular nature based on the combination of four qualities, hot and cold, dry and moist. These qualities were thought to reflect the four elements—fire, air, earth and water—that make up the universe."³ In the human physiology, the parallels of these elements were the four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. From this perspective one is healthy when the four qualities are balanced, and illness represents imbalance that can be corrected by eating foods with the opposite qualities, or purging or bloodletting to remove excesses of specific elements from the organism. Said simply: if one's illness made a person too "moist," one ate foods that were defined as "dry." If medicine was called for, it was derived from the natural world and was believed to impart essential qualities to restore balance. An upper-respiratory infection would call for the use of a "hot and dry" drug such as certain molds and fungi, which may have worked because they contained penicillin.⁴ Because one's nature changed as one aged, and a person's condition was also in part a function of their personal characteristics, establishing balance was endlessly complicated.

An example of balanced food combinations still common is the cantaloupe, defined in the Galenic universe as "moist" and "cold," eaten with ham—*prosciutto*—defined as "dry" and "hot." Other common combinations include cheese and fruit.⁵ Seen from this perspective, the marriage of pizza and beer or Coke is but a modern iteration of a very old idea. Cheese is defined as a "heavy" food, especially when melted (just as milk is defined as hard to digest when it is frothy), and the airy character of carbonated drinks (the bubbles representing air inside the liquid) such as cola or beer would balance the heavy moistness of the cheese.

Cooking changed foods to correct their elemental imbalance. A dry meat would be boiled to make it more moist; a moist meat would be roasted to make it drier. A young venison, however, might be "moist" and an old animal "dry," so a food was judged by its condition as well as type. Sauces and spices addressed the imbalance of particular foods and moved them closer to the Galenic ideal.

The indication that food was in balance—that is, healthful—was proper digestion. Medieval cookbooks combined the advice of the medical doctor and the cook, because food was seen as the key to health as well as sustenance and pleasure.⁶ If food was satisfying—that is, if it stimulated one's appetite and

was pleasurable to eat—it was believed that the body was communicating its successful digestion. Proper digestion was a key part of reestablishing bodily harmony, so in this instance the concerns of the doctor and the cook overlapped. The cook produced food that created pleasure, the signal of health.

What I (Harper) find interesting about Italians is their absolute certainty regarding the right food combinations (and, as we will discuss, sequence). Seldom have I experienced a cultural theme, aside from religion, expressed with greater fervor. The sense of right combination continues even when I point out its illogical nature or inconsistency with other agreed-upon aspects of the cuisine.

ORDER AND SEQUENCE

We now turn to sequence. Different foods are combined properly in various dishes, and then the dishes are served in a proper order. This order, which we call a template, defines the meal in all regions of Italy and with remarkable durability.

The template is as old as ancient Rome:

gestum (antipasti)
mensa prima (il primo)
mensa secunda (il secondo)
*dulcis in fundo (dolce)*⁷

The sequence became more elaborate as Italy evolved. There is evidence of the importance of meal sequence in medieval and early modern cookbooks and other descriptions of dinners hundreds of years prior. In one of several examples, an account from the thirteenth century specifies how tenants were to prepare feasts for their landlord: “one lemon at the beginning of the meal” followed by fresh pork, white chickpeas, roast capons, and “appropriate sauces” (recall the role of sauces to balance the characteristics of the dishes). “As much good, pure white wine as could be drunk” was to be served, with copious amounts of white bread.⁸

Each of these foods was a part of a sequence organized to stimulate digestion and balance the qualities of the preceding dishes. The lemon, for example, was intended to open the stomach for the feast that would follow, and the wine was to aid in the digestion of the vast quantities of food that followed.

In the sixteenth century, Platina, a noted food writer, “devotes an entire chapter . . . to discussing ‘the things that should be eaten first.’” He writes: “In choosing foods one must observe a certain order, since at the beginning of the meal one may eat fearlessly and with the greatest pleasure the things that stimulate the stomach and provide light, measured nourishment.”⁹

This long tradition of sequencing food evolved to the contemporary Italian meal. To represent its form, we modified a scheme devised by Mary Douglas:¹⁰

$$a(1\dots x)+(P/R/S)+(M/F+c1\dots x)+i+(d/ch/f)+c+l$$

We use capital letters to indicate stressed elements of the menu (those which have the first order of importance) and lowercase to indicate unstressed parts of the menu. The symbol / means “or” and in some cases “in addition to.” We use the letter a to indicate antipasto; P for pasta, R for rice, and S for soup in the first course; M for meat and F for fish in the second course, where c indicates *contorni*, the accompanying vegetables. *Insalata* (salad) is indicated by i; d represents *dolce* (sweets), ch *cheese*, and f *fruit*. The end of the meal includes c (*caff *) and l (liquor). We now describe how these elements work together to make a meal.

ANTIPASTI

There can be one to several *antipasti* (a) at a typical meal. In Bologna, a typical antipasto could be small squares of *mortadella* speared with toothpicks. A nice dinner in Venice could have *antipasti* of ten or more varieties of smoked or cured seafood, including eel, shrimp, lobster, clams, scallops, and anchovies. In Tuscany, a typical antipasto would be *crostini* (small bread crusts) smeared with pat  made from pheasant or chicken liver. In all of these examples, the *antipasti* announce the regional tastes with local specialties that will also be harmonious with succeeding dishes.

Lucia and Franco described *antipasti* they will make for an upcoming dinner. “The dinner will be based on fish,” Lucia says, “and we will buy our fish at Brunelli’s, in via Pescherie. We will prepare *cappe sante* [scallops] with Prosecco and then shrimp with salt. They are cooked in the oven covered with salt, and then you take the salt off. They cook in ten minutes, 180 degrees, wetting it slightly to keep the salt attached.”

“Then you take off the salt,” her husband Franco says, “and put them on a plate with a little bit of good oil and sea salt, not milled.”

“We will also prepare shrimp,” Lucia continues, “and, if I find them, *neonata*—newborn fishes. I’ll make some small fritters with the *neonata*, and then some anchovies fried in the vinegar.”

Patrizia asks, “Fried in the vinegar?”

“No. You open the anchovies, wash well, and drain them,” she explains. “When they are well drained, put them on a plate, sprinkle with vinegar, dip them in flour and then into the boiling oil. They become crisp and have that taste of vinegar, a little bit acidic.”



Vito and Libera had visited their son in South America and returned with several new ideas for *antipasti*. None of these foods, made from chickpeas, ground meats, and pastes, had Italian references, but they were successfully integrated into a several-course Italian meal.

“And this is the appetizer?”

“Yes, a lot of tastes.”

IL PRIMO

“P/R/S” (pasta, rice, soup) are the typical elements of *il primo piatto* (first plate). Rice and pasta do not generally appear in the same meal, though in some fashionable restaurants small dishes of pastas and risottos may be served together. There are dishes such as tortellini *alla bolognese* in which the same *mortadella* that was served as an *antipasti* will be used as an ingredient for the fillings of the tortellini, which are subsequently served as part of a soup. Meat or cheese may find its way into this course, but only as part of the sauce or as a pasta stuffing.



Penne all' arrabiata, a pasta typical of Rome, here served by Maria. *Penne all' arrabiata* roughly translates as “pissed-off penne”: the sauce combines tomatoes and red pepper flakes, served with fresh parsley. The key to the dish is pasta made with bronze dies, to create a surface that the scarce sauce will cling to. It is not eaten with cheese.

Il primo combines one of several hundred types of pastas with one of an equally long list of sauces. Together these extend themes set by the *antipasti*. Rice (arborio, grown in northern Italy), becomes risotto, a dish that adds distinctive tastes and textures to an otherwise bland food. Risotto begins with sautéed onions and cooked vegetables or mushrooms, or fruits such as orange, are added. More exotic forms include *risotto nero*, flavored with cuttlefish ink, and *risotto alla milanese*, which features saffron. Even simple parboiled rice is flavored, in Emilia-Romagna, for example, with ground *parmigiano*, butter, and the oil of truffles.

Sauces for pasta are typically based on tomatoes, garlic, and basil, but this is just the beginning. In the north, especially near Genoa, pesto is common. A sauce can be as simple as oil or butter and grated parmesan, lightly cooked, or raw vegetables may be added to pasta. In fact, each member of the full range of Italian vegetables and spices finds its place in one of the hundreds of pasta sauces.

The first plate offers simple ingredients but a full range of flavors, textures, and color in sauces and their combination with pasta or rice.



For Sunday dinner Chiara grills meat, a typical second plate at the vineyard.

IL SECONDO

The second element of our formula—(M/F+c1...)—is *il secondo piatto* (the second plate), a serving of meat or fish and one or two vegetables. The meat or fish is not generally served with sauce. Cooking is simple—frying, baking or roasting; the meat or fish will be judged by its quality rather than its dressing. This is a step back from the complexity of taste found in the first course; servings are of modest size.

Contorni are vegetable plates that accompany meat or fish. They are usually small dishes chosen to balance the courses in flavor, texture, and appearance. Peppers, broccoli, peas, artichokes, spinach, zucchini, eggplant, or other locally grown vegetables are the starting points for *contorni*. In some cases they follow the second plate and become their own dish, especially when they are elaborate.



Maria's insalata: very fresh greens and oil selected for its taste, accompanied by a special vinegar, this evening balsamic from the neighboring city of Modena.

INSALATA

The salad is nearly always a small plate of fresh greens to which the diner adds olive oil and vinegar, intended to “cleanse the palate.” It is a complex dish because, as we noted previously, there are hundreds of olive oils to choose from and there are many tastes and qualities of vinegar. The vinegar used may be *aceto balsamico di Modena* (balsamic vinegar from Modena), which is aged for several years, moved from cask to cask as it partially evaporates, and is eventually transformed into a dense, fragrant liquid that may cost several times more than the best wine on the table. Lighter vinegars, made from wine or from “fruit of the forest” (strawberries and other wild fruit), are also used. The balance of flavors in the salad is a critical element in the scheme.

THE END OF THE MEAL

The solid dinner ends with “d/c/f,” which stands for sweets (*dolce*), cheese, or fresh fruit. There are desserts that combine several of these elements, as we will see, but fruits and cheese are often served simply, and desserts can reintroduce elements such as pasta in *cannoli* (tubular pasta stuffed with cream or other fillings, depending on its regional basis).



Moscato, a dessert wine from the southern island of Pantelleria, was served with *tortes*, followed by coffee.

Coffee follows dessert, and it is a step in the meal rather than a beverage that accompanies food. Coffee is a small cup of intense flavor, black but sugared, and drunk quickly rather than sipped.

Special meals end with Italian liquor, which is believed to aid digestion (they are called *digestivos*). This is typically *grappa*, an Italian liquor distilled from the grapeskins and seeds left over from winemaking. *Grappa* can be raw or refined and can be startling after an elaborate dinner. It is drunk quickly, like coffee. Other Italian liquors include *limoncello*, sweet alcohol flavored with lemon juice and produced in the lemon-producing regions, near Amalfi, and *nocino*, flavored with walnuts. *Amaro* (bitters) is made in all regions of Italy and is flavored with herbs believed to aid in digestion. Other liquors are made or flavored with local ingredients, even including vegetables such as asparagus, and many people make or flavor their own liquor.

To see how these elements work together, we recall a dinner party hosted by Maria and Costantino, served to ten people, friends from several walks of life.



The building containing the Cipollas' flat, in an upscale suburb of Bologna

DINNER WITH MARIA AND COSTANTINO

The setting of the dinner party is their elegant flat on the outskirts of Bologna—a living room that flows into a dining room, separated by a TV built into a half-wall. A long hall proceeds to the kitchen and, along the way, past several bedrooms and two baths. The dining room is decorated with blown glass from Murano, displayed in an elliptical glass cupboard. The floors are made of large tiles of polished marble. Nothing is out of place, and one might expect photographers from a sophisticated architectural design magazine to arrive at any moment.

The dinner we first ate with the Cipollas can be represented as follows:

$$a(1+2)+(S+P)+(M+c1+M+c2)+i+(d+ch)+c+l$$

<i>Antipasti</i>	shaved artichokes soaked in mild white wine; small rolls baked with cheese
<i>Il primo</i> (first plate)	wild mushroom soup (Costantino had collected them the preceding fall; the soup was prepared in the fall and frozen), served with crusted bread rubbed with garlic and oil
<i>Il primo secondo</i> (second first plate)	homemade <i>tortelloni</i> stuffed with ground pheasant
<i>Il secondo</i> (second plate)	pork fillets
<i>Secondo secondo</i> (second second plate)	cheeks of veal
<i>Contorni</i>	for first second plate: zucchini cooked with herbs; for second second plate: polenta, fried cauliflower
<i>Insalata</i>	small greens, balsamic vinegar, and oil
<i>Dolce</i>	assorted cheeses and honeys, including chestnut honey, acacia honey, orange honey; mixed <i>pecorino</i> (sheep cheeses) and a round of three-year-aged <i>parmigiano</i>
<i>Dolce secondo</i> (second dessert)	<i>torte</i>
<i>Digestive</i>	choice of liquors: Amaro or homemade limoncello Coffee, served with hard candy

Maria and Costantino's dinner parties drew upon their primary leisure activity—traveling to learn about and to gather new foods, recipes, and menu ideas. They produce elaborate meals for friends at which no expense is spared and no detail overlooked. They draw upon the whole of Italy for tastes and foods and take cooking and eating very seriously.

Maria sees a dinner such as the grand offering above as a work in progress. As she looks at the photos, she remembers the pleasantness of the dinner and the people, but some of the dishes disappointed her. She says she and Costantino discuss the dinners when they are complete and imagine how to improve them. "Surely your standards are a bit over the average," Patrizia says, to which Maria answers, "The next one will be better!"

We'll now show how it looked, but we've left off several courses—the *antipasti*, the second dessert, the five bottles of wine, the liquor, and the hard candy.

DINNER WITH MARIA AND COSTANTINO



Costantino at the head of the table; Maria staging the dinner from the kitchen, down a long hallway from the dining room.





The kitchen, designed by Maria, is spacious and modern. She cooks in elegant clothes and does not wear an apron.



Il primo: wild mushroom soup



*Il primo secondo: homemade tortelloni
stuffed with ground pheasant*



*Il secondo: pork fillets
Contorni: zucchini cooked with herbs*



Secondo secondo: cheeks of veal
Contorni: polenta, fried cauliflower



Dolce (left and below): assorted cheeses and honeys, including chestnut honey, acacia honey, orange honey, mixed pecorino (sheep cheeses), and a round of three-year-aged parmigiano.



WINE IN SEQUENCE

The essential elements of medieval Italian cuisine, before Germanic influences were added in the late Middle Ages, were olive oil, wheat, and grapes. Grapes grow nearly everywhere in Italy, and the tastes of different wines have for centuries contributed to the sequenced meal. In the Galenic system, wine brought a dish into balance by adding its opposite characteristics. For example, the fourteenth-century physician Maino de' Maineri observed that "the wine served with fish must be stronger than that served with meat."¹¹ It was customary to serve sweet or "hot" wines with boiled or stewed foods and to end a dinner with "sweet, strong wines" that were often flavored with honey or spices.¹²

Thus the concept of an elaborate, articulated role for wine, as part of the effort to create a harmonious, balanced meal, has been part of Italian cuisine for centuries. As early as the medieval period, descriptions of dinners served to royalty or religious officials name wines from several regions of Italy, as distant as Naples or Venice, and even across the Alps in the Rhine Valley.

Certainly not all Italians are connoisseurs, and few can afford the elaborate wine menu that accompanied the meals prepared by Maria and Costantino. And as noted, in medieval Italy wine had been selected to contrast with and balance the characteristics of food, while now they are chosen to complement individual tastes of dishes. But the important point is that wine use also follows rules, which we represent as follows:

$$W(f/wh) \dots W(r/wh) + W(r/wh) \dots W(s/f)$$

In this equation "W(f/wh)" represents *vino frizzante*, that is, sparkling Italian wine such as Prosecco (from the northeast) or *spumante* (from the northwest). These are served with the *antipasti* rather than the dinner; the bottles are emptied or put aside as the first plate is served. In the absence of sparkling wines, simple white wine is sometimes served with *antipasti*.

The second unit in our schematic, "W(r/wh) ...," represents the red or white wines that complement the first and second plates. In simple dinners a single bottle may be used for both dishes. In complex dinners they are selected to refer to tastes developed in each course.

Wine is not a part of the salad course and reenters the meal with dessert.

For the final stage in the dinner, "W(s/f)," wines are typically sweet, made from rasinated grapes, which have been left on the branches for three months after they are harvested, before they are pressed. The most popular include Greco di Bianco from Calabria and Sicilian Marsala. Moscato is made in several locations, but especially prized versions come from the island of Pantelleria, far to the south of Sicily. Vin Santo is a Tuscan version. These are specialized wines and would appear only at the end of a meal with dessert. To a non-Italian

palate they are at first unusual because their sweetness is the deep taste of a quality wine rather than the thin sugariness of a commonly sweet wine.

A common modification of the wine sequence has the sparkling wine remaining from the *antipasti* served with the dessert. Typically a single small glass of sparkling wine is served with the *antipasti*, and in a dinner for four there will be a second glass available for the end of the meal. This can be represented as follows:

W(f) ... W(r/wh)+W(r/wh) ... W(f)

Water, either still or *frizzante*, is served throughout the meal. Ample amounts of water dilute the effect of wine, which is generally served in small amounts.

Strict rules guide the wine menu. Sparkling wine is drunk only before or after the meal; sweet wines are called “dessert wines,” and they are drunk only after the meal. The wines that accompany the first and second plates may mix reds and whites, but they can seldom violate the “red wine/red meat, white wine/white meat, white wine/fish” norm. In fact the wines are chosen for their tastes and characteristics in consort with specific steps of the meal. It is not necessary to finish a bottle before opening another. Wines (especially dessert wines but others as well) are recorked if they are not finished.

Costantino describes how the tastes of the wines we drank played off the tastes of specific foods, and how the wines followed a gastronomic rhythm: “In the dinner you remember [not the dinner pictured] we drank five wines, chosen according to the dish sequence, which was some light vegetable appetizers; a typical Italian-Mediterranean first dish, based on tomato, hot pepper, and parsley (*penne all’ arrabbiata*); a very strong, important second dish, as duck is in our culture; and the dessert. In our classic dinners we put cheese between the second dish and the dessert.

“The wines we combined with specific tastes were a bottle of Balther, which comes from the Trentino region, near Rovereto, and is processed according to the champagne method: fermentation in the bottle, the upending of the bottle, the cleaning of the bottom, to have a champagne without bottom sediment. And this is the case; we drank a wine I had bought directly at the producer, a farm near Rovereto, in a beautiful castle. I bought that wine there because I knew it, because it is famous, because it is a high-quality wine and, in our culture, it replaces the French champagne. We drank this with the *antipasti*.

“Then, with the first dish we had a more mellow and lighter wine, a wine for passing to the second dish. Maybe that wine was a little bit dominated by the tomato and hot pepper. However, the hot pepper taste damps down the wine, so we preferred to combine it with a less important taste, which was useful to rinse our mouth. And that wine was the Bianco di Custoza, which we bought at the

Custoza wine growers' cooperative, an association among local producers who select the best grapes to produce high-quality wines. This Bianco di Custoza is a mix of different grapes (Garganica, Tocai, Trebbiano) that turns out to be very mellow. In fact, in that country it is called 'ladies' wine,' because people usually drink it as they are chatting. In short, it is a light wine.

"With the duck, we put one of the most important Italian wines, the Brunello di Montalcino, from Tuscany, in one of its more widespread versions, the Billabani, available in the best supermarkets. It is an expensive wine, more expensive than the others, but in our culture the best supermarkets have also high-quality wines. The one we drank was six or seven years old, to be used with an important dish such as the duck. This is a typical dish of our cuisine: the duck has a very fat skin, and the salt soaks up the fat, so the skin remains crisp and the flesh is well cooked, and it becomes fragrant. It is a dish typical of north Italy, not found in the south.

"Then we ate several cheeses. Italy has an impressive variety of cheeses, now more DOC cheeses than France. That night we ate four or five kinds of cheese, made of cow milk, sheep milk, and goat milk, processed in different ways and more or less seasoned. Among them there was the classic *parmigiano*, which is a sort of champagne of the cheeses. The champagne is a product of human invention, and so developed the *parmigiano*, out of the mists of time, from a terrific intuition about a complicated process. The result is a great cheese, surely the most important cow milk cheese from the flat lands of the Po Valley. The other cheeses we ate that night come from the mountains, like the Bagoss, very rich and strong. Over those cheeses we drank a strange wine, the Amarone, also a product of human invention. The Amarone di Valpolicella is made of a raven grape that is 'faded' [harvested but left on the vine for ninety days before it is pressed]. In the fading, the Amarone gains structure and strength, and then in the processing two versions of it come out: the sweet version, called Recioto di Valpolicella, and, from a process that consumes more of the sugar, the dry version, which becomes a great red wine, grander than the Brunello. For this reason we served it after the Brunello. I bought this Amarone directly from the producer; there is a limited quantity, and it is very expensive. This wine is perfect with the cheeses, especially the hard cheeses like the Bagoss, which comes from the North Brescia Alps in Lombardy and is seasoned for a long time. It is an impressive cheese, full of taste. So we used the Amarone, which is a very powerful wine, even if quite mellow.

"The dessert was made up of various things: a fruit pie, another fruit dessert, and assorted sweets. And with it we decided, as is becoming more common in Italy, to drink a raisin wine from the south, the Moscato di Pantelleria. It is a very special wine but affordable and sold in the best supermarkets, because Pantelleria produces a lot of it. This is unusual because raisin wines are usually

very expensive. This Moscato is a powerful, full-bodied wine, to be drunk fresh, and it has the strength to stand up to the sweet dishes. And so,” Costantino concludes, “this wine stands well with the fruit, the dried fruit, and the sweets.”

Costantino introduces the world of Italian wine as integral to the meal. The range of knowledge and appreciation is at one extreme with Costantino and at the other extreme are the large numbers of Italians who drink common local wines that have customary relationships with tastes of local dishes.

IMPROVISATION

The full menu, shown above and elsewhere in our book, is served on Sundays and holidays, at parties, on special occasions, and for some on a daily basis. But it does not reflect the only way Italians eat. The cultural grid is not a strait-jacket; variation is typical, even if it is guided by rules. The variations can be summarized thus:

- The order of the menu cannot be altered.
- One course is finished before the next is begun.
- Almost any step can be left out, and if some are added they repeat the preceding step.

Some typical forms of the altered menu include these:

(P/R/S)+(M/F+c1,c2)+i+(d/ch/f)+c
(antipasti and liquor deleted)

a(1...x)+(P/R/S)+i+(d/ch/f)+c
(meat/fish, contorni, and liquor deleted)

a(1...x)+(M/F+c1,c2)+i+(d/ch/f)+c
(pasta/rice/soup deleted; this may be the evening meal, especially if pasta was served for lunch; otherwise it is not common)

(P/R/S)+c
(in this form the meal is reduced to its primary elements: pasta, soup or risotto, and coffee)

The order of removing items from the menu is also relatively fixed. Liquor is the first item to be removed. It would be odd to eat or serve pasta and sauce and add liquor after coffee. *Antipasti* is a second item to be removed, although typically *antipasti* is diminished to an elemental form, such as a few pieces of sausage, rather than completely removed from the menu. Second dishes (meat or fish) are often deleted from a menu, in which case the now-homeless *contorni* may be adapted to accompany a rice or pasta dish, although this is unusual.

Certain elements of the menu are almost never removed. They include pasta, rice or soup, sweets, and coffee. Likewise nearly all dinners include bread as a side dish, served without butter and nibbled at during the meal (or used to clean up one's sauce, called "little shoe"), and wine is nearly always a part of a meal.

The menu can also be expanded:

$$a(1\dots x)+(2P/2R/S)+(2M/2F+c1,c2,c3,c4)+i+(d+ch+f)+c+l1+l2+l3$$

In this form there may be two or more *antipasti*. Two or more pastas or even two risottos (much less common) may be served as a first plate, but very rarely, if ever, one pasta and one rice. *Il secondo* may consist of two meat dishes or two fish dishes but seldom, if ever, one fish and one meat. When there is more than one *secondo* there may also be additional *contorni*. Dessert may include cheese, sweets, and fruit (separate or in a combination). Finally, two or more liquors may be sampled at the end of a particularly celebrative meal.

MEALS IN THE STRUCTURE OF TIME

Thus far we have concentrated on single meals. But to fully understand how food is structured into the lives of Italians, we should see it in the context of a typical day.

BREAKFAST

Breakfast (*colazione*) is typically *caffè e brioche* (in Rome the pastries are called *cornetti*). You enter the bar, an impeccable space usually consisting of a glass cabinet with pastries, a bar where you stand, and perhaps a few small round tables where you can consume your coffee and roll. The *barista* is dressed stylishly, and he (usually) wears a tight apron. He is handsome and competent. You generally pay first (often a woman commands the cash register) and present your receipt to the *barista*, who has noticed you standing but waited to acknowledge your presence until he is ready to act. You order quickly; *cappuccino e brioche*, while pointing to the pastry you have chosen. He nods curtly, turns to his gleaming coffee machine, and has a steaming shot of coffee in the cappuccino cup before you can say *grazie*. He pours in the frothy milk (checking the temperature with a dial thermometer beforehand) and, in fancy bars, signs the froth with a trace of leftover coffee—an outline of a heart for a pretty woman, an abstract pattern for a man. He tears your receipt to show you have been served, and you drink your coffee and polish off your brioche while standing at the bar. You don't claim your space for longer than neces-



I estimate that there are more than a hundred coffee bars in Bologna, each with its own personality.

sary; others are waiting. In Bologna, the barman will offer cold mineral water in a shot glass, which seems the perfect complement to the coffee and pastry on a hot summer day.

These bar breakfasts take place in tens of thousands of bars in all regions of Italy, and since the government sets the minimum and maximum prices for coffee, they cost almost the same no matter how fancy the bar. You don't need to know much Italian to fit in, and it is a pleasure to enter into this ritual day after day. In a small bar you might feel you are crashing a private party, but you are always welcome, especially when you speak a little Italian (and it does not take a great deal to be appreciated). You see small acts of deviance: a drinker starting his day with *grappa* served alongside his coffee or a flirtation between the *barrista* and a customer that seems to go further than expected. You learn to appreciate the pace and enjoy your momentary participation in this Italian ritual.

Most of the people we talked to ate breakfast in a bar, but several eschewed the crowded bar and excellent coffee and ate at home, drinking tea, or even, as Patrizia has begun doing, to my dismay, preparing coffee with American methods.

"For me," Clara says, "coffee, two croissants and a glass of juice. I buy the croissants at the supermarket and then I warm them in the oven. This is

the most recent trend; before we had breakfast at the bar, and now at home.”

“And you, Barbara?”

“Milk and coffee, and plum cake.”

“Mulino Bianco [an upscale brand]?”—“Yes!”

Barbara tells us that she and Carlo have “rediscovered breakfast at home”—a very nice moment, she says. “This is a thing we had lost, because we believed you have no time: you wash yourself, get dressed, walk the dog, and have breakfast at the bar. But if you are careful with the time, you can have it at home. Breakfast has a particular atmosphere, since Carlo and I have the fortune to get up in the morning not pissed off at each other, so it is a very quiet time. So morning is a time we recovered, and we did the right thing. It is important to start the morning in this way.”

Franco and Lucia eat breakfast together at home, and then he leaves to have a second breakfast in the bar. Though retired, he cannot give up his habit, though I expect it is also a matter of enjoying a drink, cappuccino, that cannot be easily duplicated at home.

Bassano and Giorgio and Marina and Dani, who often live against the grain of Italian culture, also forgo the Italian bar breakfast.

Patrizia asks, “Tell me something about your breakfast.”

Giorgio: “Coffee, milk, and toast.”

Bassano agrees, “Coffee, milk, and toast.”

“Together?” Patrizia asks.

“Together and sitting at the set table,” Giorgio says. “We always set the table, for dinner as well, and we like to have a carefully made table.”

Marina interjects, “I imposed it on Dani. I set the table even when I eat alone—also for my breakfast.”

“On the weekdays,” Dani says, “I have fourteen minutes to wake up, wash, dress, and have breakfast.”

Marina: “It’s your choice, it is not a matter of ‘I have.’”

“And I eat seven cookies and one cup of milk and coffee, or have breakfast at the bar. But for Marina, breakfast is a ritual.”

“Yes. For me it’s a ritual. I have breakfast every morning at seven-fifteen, after Dani has left. I usually eat some fruit and some tea with cookies or cereals with soy milk. Anyway, my breakfast lasts half an hour; I prepare and eat it very slowly, and I really enjoy it.”

For most, breakfast in the bar sets a frantic pace for the day: the rush of traffic, a shot of coffee consumed quickly before reentering the crush. Later in the day, food is eaten at a leisurely pace, usually in private spaces. The price of the *caff  e brioche* inflated after the euro was introduced, but it is still typical to have breakfast for two euros. It is an affordable ritual and one that thrusts

Italians into crowded public spaces, which seems to be a necessary structural element in their days. But as we have seen, it is a cultural template that also allows for variation, improvisation, and adaptation to individual tastes and habits.

WEEKDAY LUNCH

Lunch in Italy traditionally took place between one and three p.m., and it was eaten at home. That meant that shops closed and children were sent home from school. The family gathered, ate, maybe took a nap, and then returned to work until early evening. This rhythm was altered by industrialization and urban life in general, which is not conducive to long breaks in which expensive machinery is idled. Now many Italians have a sandwich (*un panino*) in a bar for lunch, standing at a counter or squeezed into a small table, a structural parallel to the fast coffee at breakfast. It is the way Patrizia and I eat when working at the university: a quick detour from a busy schedule, sandwich and maybe a juice, followed of course by a shot of coffee. This change is one of the most fundamental in the Italian food culture, and there are many commentaries in the Italian popular press about the demise of *pranzo* (lunch) and its expected impact on the Italian family. However, the old traditions live on, and many Italians we spoke to reconvene their family life at lunch.

We visit Franco and Lucia, living the good life in the center city of Bologna. Their daughter Anna, who attends law school, lives at home and returns each day from her apprenticeship in a distant edge of the city for lunch. Luca, their son, was at that time a graduate student at the University of Bologna, had his own apartment, and yet returned every day for lunch at home. I met Anna and the parents for the first time at their home; they had not previously met an American. I had asked ahead that they prepare a typical lunch, and after protesting that a formal dinner would be more appropriate, they consented.

Later Patrizia discussed with them the photos I had made during lunch.

Franco: "There we are, our familiar group!"

Lucia (laughing): "He [Harper] wanted me to wear the apron—whatever I usually wear!"

Franco adds, "We tried to be as natural as possible."

"We served our normal meal," Lucia explains. "We made some *tagliatelle* with peas, sauce, and tomato, then there was some cheese, some ham, for Luca said, 'Mom, you don't have to make anything different.' I made some *melanzane alla parmigiano*, and he ate the *tagliatelle*, and then he ate some ham and cheese and salad. I made nothing special, for Luca said, 'Mom, you have to act normally, as usual.' Since the ham and the cheese are things I normally put on the table, I made the same for him."

LUNCH WITH FRANCO AND LUCIA, LUCA AND ANNA



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Two spaces and two forms of social life. Above and left: Lucia and Franco's kitchen and the informal dining area. Right: the living room and formal dining room.

Franco, looking at the photos: "I took off my tie, as usual. For he [Harper] insisted that we do everything in a normal way. I also took off my jacket."

Lucia points: "Look here, there was the ham in the plate, the cheese in its small basket, as usual, yes, the normal things, the table normally set up. Here is Luca, here me, here Anna, and here my husband. There was not any wine, for we don't drink it at lunch. The *tagliatelle* . . . the plates . . . and the salad. This is our everyday table. Two plates, because for us it is normal. The professor had the napkin . . . we have the napkin ring, to distinguish. Yes, I set the normal everyday table."

"I would define your expression as very satisfied," Patrizia says.

"Yes, because the *tagliatelle* were good, very good. I think so, even if I don't understand any English, and the conversation was through Luca and I did not participate much."

"So you concentrated on the *tagliatelle*."

Lucia, laughing: "Yes, I concentrated on the *tagliatelle*, which were not bad that day."

"Are they usually bad?" Patrizia asks.

"No, no. One can't be successful every time, but that day they were very good."

Patrizia comments, "It seems to me Anna too is appreciating the *tagliatelle*."

"Yes," her mother says, "Anna is not interested in the quantity but in the quality. She needs to have a lot of things, to taste a lot of things. She does not eat much, but she needs to see a lot of things."

Franco interjects: "On the other hand, Luca is for the quantity, and I am for both the quantity and the quality."

"Here," he says, looking at the photos, "we are already at the second dish; we are eating the *melanzane alla parmigiano*. Maybe Luca is translating something for me."

"I remember," Lucia adds, "that Harper said, 'Luca speaks quite good English,' and then I said, 'After all the money we spent on it, at least he can translate these four words!' Then he laughed. Here is the salad with the balsamic vinegar, and then there was the *pecorino* cheese, the one from Sardegna, that the professor really liked—he said, 'This cheese is good!'"

"Now he understood," Patrizia says, "that in Italy there is a real culture of cheese!"

"Yes, it's true," Lucia concludes.

The lunch with Lucia, Franco, and their two adult children presented the Italian family harmoniously connected—the cultural ideal. The son and daughter interrupted their busy day to come home and were rewarded with a typical Italian meal cooked with recipes that had evolved over their mother's lifetime. The daily ritual connected them to each other and to their Italian culture.

Mara and Dino, who are about my age, also make an effort to lunch at home with their son Piergiorgio, who returns to his parents' flat most days of his busy life. Invited to share one of these lunches, I was struck by the efficiency of the production (people had to return to work) and the careful treatment the food received.

Mara describes the lunch ritual as a sacrifice that she is pleased to make. For Dino the midday family ritual is equally important. They plan each lunch the night before, and if Mara cannot be present to cook, Dino takes over. Perhaps Mara has prepared a larger second dish than usual and has frozen the rest to be reheated. "As for the pasta," Dino says, "I can do it by myself!"

They are efficient; both move through the kitchen preparing food and setting the table, and in thirty minutes they serve a full-course meal.

Before they married, both of them returned to the homes of their parents for lunch. After they married and Mara had a satisfactory lunch available at the cafeteria where she worked, Dino would still return to his mother's for lunch. But Mara says, "It was a bit frustrating to remain with the same faces all the day and not to see my family. I was sorry, because I left home at eight in the morning and came back at six in the evening. I saw my husband at eight in the morning and saw him again at six in the evening, and it was too long for me. Then, changing my job, I lost the cafeteria and I worked closer to home, so I began coming home for lunch, and I love this, I do love this."

This pattern, as we suggest above, is threatened by changing work habits in Italy. As the Mediterranean schedule gives way to the nine-to-five schedule of northern Europe and North America, the role of food as experienced by the family of Mara, Dino, and Piergiorgio (and countless other Italians) will disappear. But from what I experienced, I don't expect it will happen soon.

EXPLAINING STRUCTURE

I asked Italians to explain why Italian meals are structured as they are. The pattern is so taken for granted as to make the question strange. Most patiently explained *how* the meal is structured but shrugged their shoulders when asked to explain *why*. Because it works? Who knows? The food tastes better that way! But one evening, Clara offered a logic that connected culture to poverty and plenty. She stated, "In my opinion the elaborate Italian meal, carefully structured, is the result of increasing wealth. In the poor countryside, you ate what needed for your subsistence; you ate what you had. And in conditions of scarcity the way you satisfied your basic needs did not change."



Weekday lunch with Dino, Mara, and Piergiorgio

“In everyday life,” Clara continued, “you don’t have the traditional ritualized sequence [*antipasto, primo, secondo, contorno e frutta*]. It’s not by chance that this begins when your daily life becomes more elaborate. You have some guests, or you host your friends, or in the holidays, so you structure the sequenced dinner.”

Patrizia interjects, “I don’t agree, Clara, because in everyday life we can skip the first or we can skip the second, but the structure remains.”

But Clara is adamant, “No, you wing it much more!”

“You improvise if you eat alone!”

Clara agrees, “Yes, if you eat alone, but also in a family situation when, for example, there is not a precise schedule, where the schedules overlap or shift—that is, you start eating and the others arrive, or you have to go out before the others finished. And you put all the food on the table and everybody eats without a sequence.

“On the other hand, at one time, in peasant families, there was an order to the holiday dinner. It was the exhibition of plenty, a ritual that represented overcoming starvation.”

Her husband, Gigi, agrees: “There was a sacredness in the meals.”

“Of course!” Clara says. “And the more you have, the more you add to the meal. If you think about it, you have the *antipasto*, the first plate or more than one first plate, the second plates with the *contorni*, then the sweets, the fruit, and so on.”

Pino offers, “The coffee and the *amazzacaffè* [‘coffee killer,’ the liquor you can drink at the end].”

Clara concludes: “Yes. It is a sequence that signifies prosperity, richness, that usually coincides with the holidays.”

Isabella explained structure as the simple operation of culture, in the context of centuries of tradition:

“Why do you think the menu is so rigid,” I asked, “for example, the order of dishes?”

“Cooking in Italy is an art,” Isabella explained, “a pure art. So if you eat pasta after fish, it is like you’re throwing a spot of red paint onto something beautiful. You have to follow the rules! Because the rules are not invented from one day to another. The rules come from a long tradition, a very long tradition. And the rules were made to please the palate. It’s not done because we like it that way!”

I ask if the rules of art define beauty and she demurs—no, she does not want to talk about art. “What I’m saying is not that somebody woke up and said, ‘Hmm . . . pasta should go before fish!’ It is something that has followed tradition for a long time.”

Giovanna spoke up: “I have a friend, for example, who is really a great cook. I think he could open a restaurant; he really likes to try new recipes; he puts Italian food together with food that comes maybe from Southeast Asia, or wherever. His dishes are new and original, and I have eaten a lot of them. Probably in Italy it is not easy to find people who do this. For that reason I think he is really a great cook, because he dares to try something new. For example, my partner is a very good cook, but he doesn’t dare to use ingredients that are not the usual ones. I’m more like that—in this way and this is the limit.”

I repeated an earlier question, whether this sense of structural rightness is found in other aspects of the culture, and Isabella said, “It’s just better—it’s better to have pasta first, better to drink beer with pizza.”

So it is just a matter of tradition? I ask.

Giovanna: “You don’t have any real reason to change things. It doesn’t make much sense to have fish first and pasta afterward.”

“Well,” I say, “it doesn’t make sense in your mind.”

Our discussion goes in circles; the matter is not resolvable. Preferences for structure, like food combinations, are accepted as superior and never questioned or experimented upon.

Isabella and Giovanna both travel a great deal and often struggle with the food they must eat abroad. Giovanna remarks, “For other people, like English

people, northern Europeans, maybe Americans, mixing is the best. Mixing everything on a single plate . . . is absolutely the best. I spent a lot of time in Australia. for example, and this was really difficult. We had long discussions about it and we couldn't find agreement, because it is really a cultural issue."

Another explanation for the preoccupation with food order in Italy is that Italians connect health to proper eating habits. We return to Claudius Galen, whose organizing principles were balance and equilibrium and for whom eating was the key activity for achieving and maintaining both. Recipes, cooking techniques, combining foods, and presenting them in order were ways to use food to enhance health. At the core was the mandate to eat food the body can use and to do so in a way that allows the body to happily process it.

Modern Italians are preoccupied with digestion. One of the most common evidences is the well-known Italian belief that the human system cannot digest frothy milk after ten o'clock in the morning and therefore it would be unthinkable for an Italian to drink cappuccino in the afternoon. Like many Americans, at first I found this rule very hard to follow. After all, I grew up in Minnesota and learned to drink coffee with Half-and-Half—that is, cream and milk added generously to every cup of coffee, no matter the time of day. So cappuccino was a improvement on a theme I'd grown up with and one I'd certainly never had a hard time digesting. Here is but one of several variations on a cultural cliché, the tourist who does not drink Italian coffee correctly.

"Regarding cappuccino," Isabella says, pausing over our after-dinner ice cream, which our enzymes are all digesting happily, "whether you can drink this after meals: Maybe we don't like this taste, but it is not the real problem. The real problem is that cappuccino is very heavy to digest, so if you drink it after dinner you will have bad digestion. We think it will be hard to digest. Milk, coffee, and the froth—it is *very* heavy."

Concern with digestion, however, goes far beyond whether cappuccino should be liberated from breakfast. Patrizia explained: "For a good digestion you should not mix animal proteins (meat, fish, and cheese) with carbohydrates (pasta, rice, and breads), while you can mix all kinds of vegetables. And this is a good rule for everyday cooking. When I prepare a dinner for guests, I am careful not to mix pasta and rice, or fish and meat, but I am more elastic with the other things." The concern with digestion permeates decisions about food combinations and food order—in other words, the concerns of second-century Galen.

These rules seem to apply only to Italian food, however, and only when eaten in Italy. For example, Patrizia often vacations in Spain, the country that is likely most similar to Italy, and there she happily consumes dinners of meat and fish combined, which are never served in Italy.

Patrizia and Egeria were discussing their experiences with non-Italian food, focusing not on taste but on digestibility.

Patrizia asks, “And do you go to restaurants that are not Italian?”

“With care, except the Chinese, where we used to go . . .”

“And all of us stopped going!”

“Yes,” Egeria agreed, “and all of us stopped going [laughing]. I go to the other non-Italian restaurants with care, because the food is so full of spices that it gives you some problems. For example, I like Japanese food, but I don’t trust the raw fish. I also do not think we have enzymes for certain kinds of food, like the raw fish. In Japan, I felt sick after eating the raw fish.”

Patrizia asks, “So you think that the culture produces biological differences?”

“Think about the immigrants who moved from south Italy to Germany,” Egeria answers. “They were deprived of olive oil and drawn into butter. They felt very sick. Once, in San Francisco, I tried sushi in a very good restaurant, and I remained two days looking at the ceiling and saying, ‘Oh my God, I did not have the enzymes for this food!’”

The preoccupation with proper digestion leads to *mangiare in bianco* (eating white) to reestablish the healthful balance of the body.

Patrizia explained, “*Mangiare in bianco* is linked to being ill. I feel bad—maybe yesterday I ate too much and I’d better detoxify my body. Or I got the flu and my body has to fight the virus, so I can’t ask it to work also in digestion. So in the extreme, the person eats white rice and perhaps a little *parmigiano* or butter, or pasta and butter or a small amount of oil.”

Giorgio explained it as a bodily reprieve. “After a big dinner,” he said, “we *mangiamo in bianco*. We eat lighter. White food.” This, too, is connected to health: “So when the doctor tell you to ‘eat white,’ he is telling you not to eat fried food for some days. So it was used this way. You can eat this way in a restaurant. Eating spaghetti with a lighter tomato sauce is *mangiare in bianco*. Or white meat—grilled meat, not fried. It’s a way to eat with low fat, low calories.”

Piergiorgio traced it to a kind of withdrawal one experiences when ill. You do not eat robustly; your energy and passion disappears. If you are truly ill and end up in the hospital, the digestive processes are nursed with a bland diet, but this attacks the soul of the Italian. Piergiorgio put it this way: “Eating is part of the joy of life. One of the things that makes a person sad in the hospital is to eat the food: *mangiare in bianco* is associated with sickness.”

“Eating white” is so persuasive that one can order it, as an unlisted menu item, in an Italian restaurant. That this was not available in the United States bothered Patrizia, because it meant that foods were not presented in the context of healthful balance. “If you go in an American restaurant,” she explained to Giorgio, who had never been out of Italy, “often you just find fried food. Fish, meat, fried. If you ask for something different, *in bianco*, it doesn’t exist.” She explained to me: “In all Italian restaurants, *all*, you can ask for pasta just with

oil and *parmigiano*, rice with oil and *parmigiano*, meat just grilled. Even if it is not on the menu, they will prepare it for you. A restaurant in which you can't ask for *mangiare in bianco* does not exist."

The preoccupation with digestion, in illness and in health, is but part of a larger Italian attention to bodily processes. Tim Parks, adapting to his new Italian life, was startled to find in his child's preschool a bulletin board that lists the menu (exceptional homecooked food, he reports) and, next to it, a list of the kids and their "discharges":

Marco: uno bene

Stefania: due (liquido)

Gigi: uno (abbondante)

Paola: diarrea¹³

Parks finds that people talk about body function in detail as a matter of course. In this scene he and his Italian wife have moved to a small town in northeastern Italy:

As so often with Italian acquaintances, we are not far into our first evening with the Vinsintinis before Orietta is discussing her blood pressure. Which is a mite high. She shouldn't have more than two cups of coffee a day. Also she occasionally gets attacks of tachycardia. She is appalled to discover that I don't even know my own blood pressure. . . . Orietta explains that after she felt somewhat faint a few days ago the doctor arranged for her to have an exhaustive series of blood and urine tests, together with an electrocardiogram and a heart scan. She has thus been getting up early every morning to get to the hospital, wait in all the queues, fill in all the forms, and fix all the appointments. . . . I can't decide if this is surprisingly intimate or rather frightening, or both. And I remember our landlady . . . fiddling with her keys at the gate that first day, talking about her gynecological problems.¹⁴

Bred in a British culture of nondisclosure, Parks found himself suddenly in a land of full disclosure. He finds that many elements of Italian culture appear to be irrational but they produce a culture that works very well. We call those hidden reasons "latent functions" and turn to them next.

LATENT FUNCTIONS

Beneath the manifest functions of social phenomena are what sociologists call latent functions.¹⁵ In the following we shall offer an understanding of manifest and latent functions in Italian food combination, sequence, and digestible "rightness."

The manifest function of a structured meal is to feed a family in an efficient manner—that is, in a way that does not require reinvention every time a group called a family gathers to eat. The structured meal menu sorts food into categories that are culturally meaningful, defining order, pace, and rules for mixing. In other words, the structure of the menu involves the fundamental social construction of the meal. In the case of Italy it also achieves several latent or taken-for-granted ends, which we list below.

First, the structured menu controls potentially harmful substances. Sweets are eaten only after the completion of the meal, when one has less appetite, so the structure of the meal (and the role of the meals in the day) discourages snacking on sweets.

Alcohol is another potentially dangerous food controlled by its social definition and resulting practice: in the form of wine it is considered to be food, and considering norms against gluttony it is generally consumed moderately. In Italy the host typically does not serve the wine, and as a result she or he does not control the rate of consumption (in other cultures hosts often pour, which tends to increase consumption). Because diners serve their own wine, they typically follow the norm of the table, which is to serve themselves sparingly. Distilled or flavored alcohol is the final stage of a long meal, and it is consumed in small amounts with the belief that it aids digestion (as noted, it is called a *digestivo*). Outside of the structure of the meal, it is considered deviant to drink alcohol.

By way of illustration, I asked several Italians: “Would you say, at five o’clock, let’s have an *Amaro*?” (*Amaro* is a local liquor flavored with spices.)

Isabella: “No, never *Amaro* at five o’clock! [All agree.] Okay, if you are an alcoholic!”

“But that is an interesting point, isn’t it?” I say. “You have rules to say you drink this at such and such a time. And therefore you don’t have whiskies at five in the afternoon, like they might in England. For another example, in Italy you pour your own wine. In America the host pours the wine.”

Rita offers, “Probably because the wine is more precious there. And there is no old tradition of wine. For us it is like the water.”

But as with all social definitions, there is always a place for deviance. Italians keep a tight rein on the consumption of liquor, but the early coffee drinker who wants a shot of *grappa* has it added to his coffee, and presto, *caffè corretto*!

A second function of the meal structure (*antipasti, primo, secondo, contorni, dolce*) is to keep tastes separate. Concentrating on one course allows the diner to reaffirm its character and to judge its excellence or lack thereof. There are small combinations to judge as well: mixed *antipasti*; sauces for pasta or meat; *contorni* in profusion. In the sequential meal these combinations are not lost in a large combination of foods eaten at the same time.

Third, the sequenced meal extends the dinner. Everyone must finish one stage of the meal before moving to the next. Conversation is steady; food becomes the basis of social life, rather than an adjunct to it. Virtually all of our subjects said they feed guests as a social activity and when dining is complete the evening is over. This is likely midnight or later, so that the end of the meal is the end of the day as well.

The fourth function of the sequence is that it involves a more complicated preparation. In Italy this means that one person (usually the wife or mother, as noted earlier) is engaged in cooking, delivering food to the table, and changing plates, in addition to eating and participating in conversation. Cooks such as Maria prepared elaborate meals in elegant clothes and maintained their dual roles as participant and cook, and others organized dinners that would allow them to spend most of their time out of the kitchen.

Finally, the structured menu ritualizes the meal. To eat in Italy is to reenact one's membership in Italian culture. Because eating is complicated, time consuming, and social, it is likely the most important way culture is performed by most Italians.

Mostly Italians seem to enjoy being Italian and are pleased to share the critical element of food with the lucky outsiders who are invited to their homes. While Italians feel superior to other cultures regarding food, they do not try to change people who do not agree with them. "Do what you want," says Patrizia, "but the important thing is that you don't want to convince me that your way is better."

CHANGE

The sequenced meal is challenged by at least two forces. The first is the sense, reiterated by many Italians, that servings have become larger and therefore to eat a full menu now is more than most can handle. Pasta should be no more than a small fistful; the second plate should be a small helping of meat or fish; *antipasti* and *contorni* should be small morsels of interesting food.

A second assault on the traditional menu may be the "sampling tourist" who mixes and matches, often to the consternation of restaurant owners. For example, I recall a dinner at an upscale restaurant in Rome in which our party of four ate one antipasto; no first plates; second plates of roasted lamb, broiled fish, and two orders of Saltimbocca; two salads; four after-dinner drinks; one dessert; and no coffee. While we were treated with the affection typically reserved for naughty children, our waitress, who appeared to be the mama of the household, was clearly miffed that we ordered only one *antipasto*, since these were the restaurant's specialty. Earlier in our three-month stay in Italy we might have caved, but we had gained sufficient confidence to hold our ground. It had not helped the case of the waitress that she had already brought to the table six

complimentary fried-rice balls with mozzarella (*suppli*), a dish of lightly fried zucchini, and a bowl of hot bread resembling Indian nan.

The tourist makes the point that rigid structure and unvarying selections are difficult for people used to eating sushi one night, Thai food the next, Mexican on the third, and a barbecue on the next. It is hard to imagine eating tortellini on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the rest of my days, no matter how good they are. Dino told me that as he ages he has a stronger desire for the regional tastes of Emilia-Romagna, and by saying this he is reaffirming his identity as an Italian and also how different we are. As much as I admire the culture and even want to become a part of it, my cultural genetics are not attuned to the mix of structure and improvisation that it takes to be Italian.

So to be Italian is to create and sustain sufficient structure to preserve the society and enough improvisation to add creative tension to the strongest patterns of behavior and belief.



Bologna food shop. The sign at the top of the image reads "Handmade boxes, to collect." The sign in the lower part of the frame reads "The *mortadella* is for Bolognese people and for tourists."

Class, Regionalism, and Commitment

It is popular wisdom in Italy that marriages to the girl next door are more successful than marriages to partners from afar. *Corriere della Sera* once ran an interesting feature on this subject, with detailed statistics to show that divorce rates were higher amongst international marriages than national ones, and again amongst interregional marriages than local ones. A crucial reason for this latter statistic, according to the newspaper, was to be found in the problem of cuisine. Once the “romance period” was over, the man would feel unhappy to find that the meal on his plate was cooked, not as mother cooked it in Rome, but as Laura cooks it in Rovigo, the salad tossed not as Mamma tossed it in Palermo, but as Monica sees fit in Parma. For women are not thought of as good cooks or bad, but merely, or more importantly, as cooking in the way one does in a particular area: good cooking being by definition the cooking of the place you were born and bred.¹

Perhaps we have implied that Italians regard food in essentially similar ways. That is clearly not the case. We have written about differences from the perspective of individual families and dinners, but now we shall describe a more general picture.

The differences among the people we studied could, we reasoned, be summarized as the varying intensity of people’s interest in or commitment to food, and their preferences, whether regional (Bologna) or national, that is, pan-Italian. We portray this in a “cultural chart” by way of a two-by-two table, one of sociology’s oldest and most durable tricks of the trade. The two-by-two table is based on the idea that a single dimension of culture can be separated into two parts and that two of these dimensions can be combined, to produce four possible combinations among their parts. It sounds complicated but becomes very simple when you see it, as pictured below.

ORIENTATIONS TO FOOD: FOCUS AND LEVELS OF COMMITMENT

		LEVELS OF COMMITMENT	
		<i>Ritualistic</i>	<i>Pragmatic</i>
FOCUS	<i>Traditional (local; regionalism)</i>	Strongly connected to local food; belief, identity derived from local food traditions	Eats local foods mostly because it is practical; not overly concerned about the larger implications
	<i>Eclectic (pan-Italian)</i>	Explores Italian food from many regions of Italy as a focus of life and cultural identity	Creates a pan-Italian cuisine for practical reasons such as dietary preference and marriage harmony

The same schema could be used to study many aspects of culture. I asked my students to apply the model to American culture, and their answers included the interesting idea that orientation to religion could be studied with this approach. Some people are traditional and ritualistic (the cell on the upper left): they participate in a single religion because they have deep belief, and they do so with ritualistic regularity. Or, moving to the cell on the upper right, they may be traditionally oriented (one grows up Catholic and never questions it) and pragmatic, meaning that they might participate in order to smooth over family relationships or to make holidays work, but belief is secondary. On the second row, lower left, people might take an eclectic orientation to religion: they may participate in several religions because they are on a spiritual quest. Their participation is serious and belief-driven. The bottom right cell, the eclectic pragmatists, are those who may dabble in various religions that are trendy or when it can advance them in one social arena or another. My students offered several other interesting applications of our model, for example, to map people's occupational choice or musical preferences. Even this simple exercise suggests to us that the cultural map has interesting potential.

Before proceeding, we must acknowledge that the simplicity of two-by-two tables is also their shortcoming. There are ranges in all these measures ("ritualism" and "pragmatism," for example, are not absolute opposites) and overlap between the categories. There are people who may occupy one cell on the table at one time and another cell at a different time. Like all empirical measures in sociology, it must be seen as tentative, partly contradictory, and evolving rather than fixed in meaning.

THE LOGIC OF THE TABLE

We classify Italians who cook regional food (in this case Bolognese cuisine) as *traditional* (top row). Among traditionalists are individuals, families, or even

restaurants for whom or which the regional tastes and traditions are most important—what we refer to as *ritualistic* (upper left cell). For *traditional ritualists* cooking or eating Bolognese style is a passion, and no other possibility is really imaginable. They have grown up with certain tastes, and these constitute the *right* and *only* way to eat. Eating has meaning in and of itself, as in the case of a ritual.

However, many people we met in our research (and perhaps Patrizia herself) eat Bolognese style as a matter of course, but they maintain a *pragmatic* attitude toward food and eating. It is less of a central life passion than it is for the ritualists. The pragmatic traditionalist cooks Bolognese fare because out of habit; they may be very good cooks, but food is not a fetish, a religion, or a constant preoccupation. On our table, this is the category made by the intersection of pragmatism and traditionalism—the upper right cell.

In the second row are Italian people who have an *eclectic* orientation to food, meaning they borrow tastes, recipes, wines, combinations, and other elements of cuisine from all regions of Italy. In the lower left cell of our table (*eclectic ritualists*) are those who experiment with forms of Italian food as a passion and major life theme; they travel throughout the country to sample different foods, recipes, menus, and wines, and they bring these back to their constantly evolving family food culture. The seriousness of their commitment to knowing about and experiencing Italian regional cuisines makes them ritualists; their interest is substantially more than a hobby and may even lead to part-time jobs or other related activities. For these people, Italian food is the basis of their social life, manifested in elaborate dinner parties and high-quality eating on a day-to-day basis. It justifies spending considerable amounts of the family budget and can become the basis of a family's identity.

Finally, in the lower right cell of our table are those with an *eclectic* attitude toward regionalism (that is, their food preferences are larger than Bolognese) but have practical reasons for it. Who are they? Usually they married a spouse from a different part of Italy, and the resulting family must create a cuisine to satisfy palates that reflect modest to significant regional differences. Or they simply may not like the food they grew up with. They may have traveled or lived in different parts of Italy and developed appreciation for the tastes of a different region. They may be seeking a healthier diet than their regional choices offer (Bolognese cuisine, for example, is heavier in fat than other Italian cuisines). They may live inland and discover that they like fish, or they may live on the coast and develop a preference for beef. A Venetian may travel to Naples and come back with a passion for *caprese* (*mozzarella di bufala* and fresh tomatoes, with basil and oil), or a person from Naples may journey to Venice and find herself fixated on fettuccine flavored with cuttlefish ink and related lagoon recipes. The challenge the eclectic pragmatist faces is finding

fresh and high-quality food from different regions—not always easy. That regionalism is so powerful in Italy speaks to the degree to which the foods and tastes of specific places dominate local cuisines.

Social class influences where one lands on our table. To be in certain cells requires more money, time and opportunity to travel, and a distanced, almost “outsider” perspective from which to view one’s own culture. These tend to be associated with higher levels of education and income.

One factor connects all of the people we studied. No matter how eclectic or traditional, committed or pragmatic, they all cook in the Italian style. A dish from Spain or another Mediterranean culture might creep into the repertoire of an eclectic ritualist, a traditional pragmatist from a northern border region may cook with German or Austrian themes, but even with these rare exceptions noted, the Italian style prevailed in both form and content. None of our subjects throws a hamburger on the grill, makes a steak and kidney pie or a Hungarian goulash, or pops a prepared meal into the microwave. No one grazed in the kitchen or ate junk food; even those who live alone made themselves an Italian meal on a daily basis.

We shall now revisit some of the people we have met previously and eat a few more dinners with them to see how our model works.

TRADITIONAL RITUALISM

		LEVELS OF COMMITMENT	
		<i>Ritualistic</i>	<i>Pragmatic</i>
FOCUS	<i>Traditional (local; regionalism)</i>	Side Tortellini society Diana restaurant Dino and Mara Roberta and Domenico Chiara	
	<i>Eclectic (pan-Italian)</i>		

When you search Web sites for authentic regional food of Bologna, you are directed to the restaurant Diana. I was taken there when I first lectured at the university—a great honor; the Bolognese are proud if it. The Diana serves Bolognese fare, and only Bolognese fare. But its food (except perhaps the *zampone*—finely ground meats boiled in a sack, typically made only at home at Christmas) is exactly what is produced in the kitchens of the traditionalists. Its tortellini are succulent but not more so than Side's; its broth carries the same sheen from the filet mignon and beef tongue that constitute its base. To dine in the Diana, or another similar restaurant in Bologna, is to celebrate a pure form, and to spend a great deal of money doing so.

The Diana represents *traditional ritualism*—a place for visitors to experience the best of Emilia-Romagna. What of the people whose homes we dined in?

We return to Mara and Dino, father of my friend Piergiorgio. Piergiorgio has invited me home for a typical weekday lunch, as we described earlier, in their pleasant flat on the eastern outskirts of the city. It is where Piergiorgio grew up, and though he now lives on his own, his bedroom in his parents' house remains perfectly organized—maybe awaiting his return.

As we noted, Piergiorgio returns home for lunch most days of the week, and his mother Mara prepares pasta and a second dish. She makes her own pasta or buys fresh pasta for one of her standard Bolognese dishes. The day I visited we have a first course of *tagliatelle* with a homemade sauce of tomatoes and butter. Dino's favorite dish is *prosciutto* fried in butter, served with fresh *tagliatelle*. I marvel at his thin physique. The second course served that day consisted of tender pork fillets, fried quickly with a little garlic.

Dino cultivated these tastes as a child, and as we noted earlier, for much of his adulthood he returned to his mother's home for lunch. Eating with his mother was "a routine—it was a traditional menu, in the sense that my mother often made pasta, like *tagliatelle*. It was not a fanciful cuisine, rather a nourishing cuisine. So I ate homemade pasta with *ragù*, traditional cuisine from Bologna." Her Bolognese cuisine was "a habit" that did not only exist in his home. "When I went downstairs on my way to school," he says, "I was filled with smells coming out of the doors of my neighbors. And you could guess what they were cooking!"

Why do these tastes locate us so powerfully? For Dino, Mara, and Piergiorgio, the importance of their traditional lunch is in part the reenactment of an event that fewer and fewer Italians can squeeze into their lives. It takes a lot of planning and is much more complicated than a sandwich in a neighborhood bar. But both Dino and Mara expressed their pleasure of seeing each other and Piergiorgio at midday around the comfort of familiar food, Bolognese fare through and through.

Perhaps our clearest example of traditional ritualism is Side, a working-class woman, seasoned by a life of hard work, who has seldom traveled more than a few miles from Bologna. Her family's cuisine is quintessentially traditional; Side cooks Bolognese style and never any other. We ate with Side and Marco two times, returning the second time so I could photograph her making tortellini. Their home, on the western outskirts of the city, paid for over decades of sacrifice, is substantial and comfortable. Both of our lunches were the most traditional food you can eat in Bologna: tortellini (made some days before and dried) in broth (*brodo*). The broth is made by simmering carrots, onions, and celery with pieces of filet mignon, beef tongue, and chicken for several hours. The vegetables are discarded, and the meat is removed and allowed to cool. The tortellini is cooked in the broth and served (as soup) as the first course. The second course consists of the fork-tender meat, served cold with ground sea salt and drizzled with olive oil. The second time we ate Side's tortellini, she had created a green sauce of her own design for the meat, a not uncommon variation. She served vegetables (*contorni*) with the meat, and we then finished with a *torte* we had brought. The wine was a generic red or white that she and her husband buy in bulk and bottle themselves.

We ask Side if she always makes her own pasta. She says yes, for the most part. She remembers again the critical gaze of her mother-in-law—"in her opinion, I used up too much; I wasted! So she made the pasta. And, little by little, I too began. I helped her; I made *sfoglia* when she was no longer able to make it and because things were going better, so we could make *sfoglia* every Sunday. It was a ritual, with the broth, the *tagliatelline*. Because she also loved *sfoglia*, even if she was always saying that we had to spend less money."

There are several variations on the theme of tortellini stuffing. "We learned that recipe, the one you have eaten," Side says, "looking for the best we could find. We make it the Bologna way: *mortadella*, pork filet and chicken breast, eggs and *parmigiano*." We ask how long she has followed that recipe, and she answers, "Around thirty-five years." Later Patrizia vehemently disagrees with the use of chicken breast, no matter how long Side has included it in her recipe.

Side cooks Bolognese style because she has experienced no other. She and Marco have traveled away from Bologna only a few times, with other retired people on tours to nearby regions. The tastes are ingrained to the point that few alternatives are imaginable.

Ritualistic traditionalism exists where regional foodways have produced distinctive recipes, regarded as nonnegotiable blueprints. For example, Bolognese accept two or three legitimate preparations of tortellini, but the variations adapt the dish for different holidays rather than offering variety for the daily menu.

MAKING TORTELLINI WITH SIDE: TRADITIONAL RITUALISM



Side and Marco in the back garden of their home, built over the full duration of their marriage.



As is typical in Emilia-Romagna, Side uses soft flour, not durum semolina, to make *sfoglia*, adding eggs to increase the elasticity of the pasta and enhance flavor.



Side kneads the dough for about twenty minutes.



Side rolls it flat, to a thickness that will work for *tortellini*.



She cuts the *sfoglia* into small squares, places a finger-pinch full of previously prepared stuffing in the center, and folds each into the belly-button shape of *tortellini*. She taught me how to do it but pronounced mine *brutto*—ugly!



Stuffing the belly button



The *tortellini* must dry before they can be cooked; for our dinner Side prepared *tortellini* she had made the week before.



Tortellini served the traditional Bolognese way: as a first plate, a combination of pasta and soup. The dish is called *brodo* (broth). The meat used to make the broth becomes the second plate, served cold, with sea salt and olive oil.



At a Bolognese supermarket Patrizia buys prepackaged meats for making broth for *tortellini*.

Mostly you make tortellini as Side did, in broth, and in the grocery stores the meats and vegetables you need to prepare it are prepackaged.

Ritualistic traditionalism also exists at the other end of the social class hierarchy. Silvia *due* remembers her grandfather, a member of the upper strata of the Bolognese bourgeoisie: “If I think about a very affective, emotional relationship with food, I remember my grandfather, the father of my mother. He was a very friendly person, a warm person. He knew everybody in town, and he organized both lunches and dinners at home. And he also founded a club to eat the real tortellini. It was a social circle, named for the ‘culture of the tortellini.’ It was where people become something like brothers, sharing the culture of the tortellini. There were about thirty people, wealthy, and they loved food, and so they searched for the best tortellini in restaurants around Bologna, cooked in a variety of ways. It was a good excuse to go out together, to be friends, and to taste excellent food. They were very selective, so you had to be able to afford the best. They met more or less once a month in this club, but they also often met in other local circles, such as the Rotary or a so-called ‘hunter’s club,’ which is the most important in town.”

Ritualistic traditionalism exists for different reasons in different class settings. For Side and others who have lived their whole lives in Bologna, it is a way of life. Because they have experienced Italian culture deeply but not broadly, they do not imagine alternatives. There is passion involved; Side was proud of her cooking, as well she should be. For Dino and Mara, firmly in the middle

class, traditional cooking re-creates daily family rituals. Dino has traveled in and outside Italy; when he is not able to eat his Bolognese food he describes himself as sad, and returning to the tastes of his traditional food produces for him a sense of well-being. Finally, there are those among the leisured upper classes, such as Silvia's grandfather, for whom the importance of Bolognese food *done the right way* becomes the basis of his participation in the ruling class of the city.

Finally, regionalism has stimulated the growth of agritourism. Regionalism depends on foods grown and manufactured in old ways. Industrial production mutes the distinctive tastes of foods produced in specific ways and climates, and the trend toward industrial manufacture of food is occurring in Italy as well as elsewhere. It is, however, a partial trend, coinciding with efforts to preserve regional craft modes of food production. It is the sense that regional food is special that is behind the integration of tourism into working agricultural production or, in some cases, transforms productive agriculture into museums for tourists.

TRADITIONAL PRAGMATISTS

		LEVELS OF COMMITMENT	
		<i>Ritualistic</i>	<i>Pragmatic</i>
FOCUS	<i>Traditional (local; regionalism)</i>		Barbara and Carlo Patrizia <i>due</i> Cristina Giovanna
	<i>Eclectic (pan-Italian)</i>		

Traditional pragmatists have a less intense commitment to food in general, but they retain a commitment to regional tastes. For some (for example, Cristina), food is the means to a certain kind of social existence rather than an end in and of itself. In other cases (Patrizia *due*), the people who are responsible for preparing the food do not like food very much, so they prepare it as a duty rather than a passion. Giovanna, a single mother, told us that for her the food is not very important. She does her best to cook for her daughter: "Most of the things I learned to cook I did because of my daughter, because otherwise I really would not cook. I don't really care. My partner, who is a great cook, likes to cook very much and to have a good dinner. I've learned that I'm not really

that kind of person! For some of my friends being on holiday means having a good dinner every day, eating a lot and well. And after two or three days of that, they are very happy. I am very sad [laughing] because I've eaten too much! And so I don't like eating as a goal, a source of pleasure. Most of the time I just eat because I'm hungry.

"Of course," she continues, "I don't like to eat things that are bad, that are not tasty. But it's not important; to have a good dinner is not one of my pleasures. I have different kinds of pleasure—maybe participating in sports, going for a walk, or doing something more active than sitting down and eating."

I ask her if these are unusual sentiments in a culture that takes food so seriously. She replies that she is not atypical, especially in the social world she inhabits. She is a scientist, and she associates with other professionals who live in the sophisticated cities of Bologna or Milan. "There are people who like cooking and eating, and have a stronger relationship with food than I do, but others do not. Probably in the south of Italy the relationship with food is much stronger; there my point of view would be more unusual."

Traditional pragmatism is the fare of *trattorie* throughout Italy. The food is generally tasty and well prepared, though more modest in reach than is found in a restaurant such as the Diana, and the setting, dinnerware, and service are informal. They are comfortable rather than formal and intimidating, and the food is typically regional. For example, in a *trattoria* near the University of Bologna, a *sfoglina* (pasta maker) clad in a chef's apron stands at a table in the center of the dining room, making the tortellini and other stuffed pastas that appear on the menu. (These *sfogline* are also seen working on their tortellini, one at a time, in storefronts where handmade stuffed pastas are sold.)

Several of the families we dined with maintain a traditionally pragmatic orientation to regional taste. For Cristina, for example, food is a means to social relationships rather than an end in itself. The dinner party I attended at her house was informal; guests crowded into the kitchen and helped prepare the food. She had previously described her dinners as an expression of her affection—love, in her words. The table was set quickly and the dishes were not special.

Pragmatic traditionalists are found throughout the class structure, but for varying reasons.

The two dinners served by Barbara and Carlo consisted of tasty and simple dishes they make on a regular basis. *Antipasti* for both dinners consisted of *mortadella*, cut into little cubes and stuck with toothpicks. They also served *ciccioli*: deep fried nose, ears, other "garbage" (in Patrizia's words) of the pig deep fried. Pino and Carlo like it; the women are grossed out, and a taste of it transported me immediately to a sports bar in Pittsburgh. In addition, they serve pickled onions and artichokes.

The first dinner was based on a pasta served with a simple red sauce; the second featured lasagna made with pasta flavored with nettles.

We drank wine we brought (Sangiovese, four years old, from a vineyard about forty miles away), which they regarded as special; their typical wine is purchased in bulk and bottled by a local winemaker.

We finished with artisan-made ice cream; then we moved to the living room for *grappa* and talk. One evening Carlo shared his homemade *nocino*, walnut liquor made from a recipe handed down for several generations.

Our dinners were informal and convivial. Because we ate in the kitchen, Barbara talked and joked as she cooked. Later, reflecting on the photos I made, she says that having the kitchen and table together means that “we never leave the table. That is, if there are friends, it is very rare that we go to the living room after dinner, as it happened with Doug, when we moved to the living room to have a drink.”

Carlo added, “Sometimes it happens.”

“But rarely, if you think about it. I noticed that we more often remain at the table. And the bottle of the wine remains on the table, and then the bottles of *nocino* and of *grappa* arrive, and you taste them, continuing to chat. I notice this: we very often remain in the kitchen for hours. The idea of moving to the living room does not come to my mind.”

“At the table people are at their ease,” Carlo said.

“Yes, it is less formal at the table. The living room is more formal, not in our style.”

Traditional pragmatists are often informal in this manner; food may be consumed in a relatively (for Italy) utilitarian manner. Barbara and Carlo both return home for lunch, for a quick plate of ham and cheese or maybe, for Carlo, some pasta.

Barbara and Carlo have a limited social life and relatively few resources to devote to fancy cultural consumption. Neither has been far from Bologna, and their daily cuisine is a natural part of their upbringing and habits. They both cook and share kitchen cleanup, though in the dinners we shared with them, Barbara was master of the kitchen.

Our last visit to pragmatic traditionalists takes us to the family of Patrizia *due*. She lives with her husband Menotti, a glass engineer who works in Bologna and other parts of Italy. Patrizia is a primary school teacher, and they have two sons in their early twenties who live at home.

They live in a flat in a six-story building, surrounded by gardens, large shrubs, and trimmed trees. There was a basketball court at one end of the courtyard where older kids were playing as we arrived for lunch. The build-

TRADITIONAL PRAGMATISM: DINNER WITH CARLO AND BARBARA



Carlo shows us a pasta he has just purchased.



Barbara asks for Patrizia's choice regarding the pasta she is preparing.



Barbara cooks the pasta.

ing entrance was spare and clean, and the public spaces surrounding the flat were clear of litter.

The flat itself is typical of post–World War II dwellings; the rooms are not large, but they have high ceilings. The kitchen was five by fifteen feet; a cat box and a mop in the corner suggested a lack of storage space. The kitchen (like all Italian kitchens we entered) was spotless and covered with sparkling tile. The family of four typically eats at a tiny table in the kitchen (a tight squeeze), but they set up a table in the living room for the lunch they prepared for me. They seldom entertain, so dining in the living room was unusual. The pots and pans were well used and not the high-quality kitchenware found in the homes of those we regard as ritualists. The food served was typical Bolognese fare. Patrizia is not particularly interested in food and nibbled on *antipasti* (pickled onions) as the rest of the family ate pasta with a *ragù* that features peas and *speck*, a dried ham. Our second dish of *prosciutto* and cheese led to a dessert of *crème caramel*, which Patrizia had cooked. The family shared a bottle of wine for lunch and uncorked a sweet raisin wine (a Moscato of Pantelleria) for dessert.

This family dines out just three or four times a year. Patrizia said she dislikes the social posing in restaurants and finds them expensive. Much of her spare time was spent taking care of her aging mother, who lived nearby. I asked her if she ate in other kinds of restaurants, such as Chinese, and she replied that she would like to but her husband would not. She tried to make couscous one time, but “it did not come off.” She also remembered trying to cook Indian rice, with curry, but her family rejected it. I asked her what second plate she prefers, to which she replied, “I don’t know. I just live with yogurt and salad. I’m not very inclined to food; I don’t have any passion for it. I never have a real desire for something, I never think, ‘Oh, I would like to eat this or that.’ Sometimes for me eating is like suffering, an obligation. When I feel like that I usually eat a yogurt. In fact, my chiropractor compared me to a floating seaweed.”

I asked her if she drinks wine. “Sometimes,” she said, “but I immediately become drunk, with just a little bit.” Does the family usually drink wine for wine for dinner? “Rarely. Okay, people say that one glass of red wine a day is very healthy. . . . Anyway, we drink just water.”

Pragmatists show the variations in interest and commitment to food. As life speeds up in Italy, fewer families have the time or energy required to treat food ritualistically, and likely many will become more pragmatic. Frozen or previously prepared food will enter the Italian kitchen, making cooking easier. But even the most pragmatic of the traditionalists maintain the structure of the Italian meal and occasionally prepare a feast that the most committed ritualist would admire.

TRADITIONAL PRAGMATISM: LUNCH WITH PATRIZIA *DUE* AND HER FAMILY



Patrizia prepares pasta with peas and *speck*; we eat in the living room, which has been converted to a dining room for this lunch only.



FORCES INFLUENCING REGIONALISM (TRADITIONALISM) AND ECLECTICISM (PRAGMATISM)

In moving to the second row of our table, we identify opposing phenomena: strongly defined local cuisines (regionalism) and people committed to experiencing a range of them. We have discussed these phenomena from several points of view already, but there is still more to consider.

New tastes have been brought to Italy throughout centuries of immigration. Jewish cuisine was an important source of Roman food; Greek, French, African, and other influences influenced Sicilian cuisine; Middle Eastern and Indian influences are strong in southern coastal regions; and Albanian and other Eastern European influences are found in the inland south and the southern coasts. The great studies in Italian of regional food differences provide the details.²

The basis of regionalism is material difference, including climate, soil, and topography. Many of the foods from specific regions do not travel well or at all. For example, some tomato varieties must be eaten within a day of their harvest, and they are too soft to ship even locally. Important ingredients of regional dishes may grow only in the wild and thus are available only locally.

I experienced this on a recent trip to Urbino, about a hundred miles southeast of Bologna. I was having a glass of wine in a bar, filled with students celebrating their graduation. The waiter brought tray after tray of *tagliolini al tartufo* (truffles with pasta in cream sauce) to their tables, filling the room the scent of mushrooms. Truffles are specialties of two Italian regions: the white mushroom *tartufo bianco* is from a small region of Piemonte, while black truffles are common near Urbino. Earlier in the day I had seen truffles on display outside a restaurant; clearly a successful truffle hunter had sold his merchandise around the city. Following the lead of the students, we ordered plates of the creamy pasta, and it was succulent and fragrant. To a person unaccustomed to the smell or taste of truffles (our traditionalist for whom only Bolognese taste is correct), the strongly flavored dish could be repugnant; to those attuned to a different regional set of tastes it was extraordinary. In fact, as a person with decidedly eclectic tastes, I judged the *tagliolini al tartufo* the most distinctive and desirable plate of pasta I could remember eating.

Regional differences became strong because historically few Italians moved or even visited other regions of the country. Until 150 years ago Italy had no common language and few roads over the mountains that nearly cover the country. Local foods became the basis of what was desirable and even acceptable. Mario Puzo, describing culinary discord among bandits in Sicily, wrote, "Preparing the communal evening meal sometimes caused arguments. Every village in Sicily had a different recipe for squid and eels, disagreed on what

herbs should be disbarred from the tomato sauce. And whether sausages should ever be baked.”³

Elizabeth Romer tells of how a wedding feast in rural Umbria introduced Tuscans, living just one valley away, to new food preparations, tastes, and combinations.⁴ For Silvana—the daily manager of food for the family and occasional workers—the wedding feast was a rare opportunity to consume exotic foods: new dishes, food combinations, and tastes from just over the mountains.

Patrizia’s mother Francesca and aunt Agnese spent their whole lives in Bologna, but just next door (over a range of mountains) is Tuscany, where Patrizia remembers her parents taking her on rare occasions to eat *bistecca alla fiorentina* (the famous beefsteak of Tuscany), seldom served in Bologna. She asks her mother, “Are there recipes from Tuscany that entered your cuisine?”

Agnese and Francesca agree: “A few.”

“Do you know and cook *ribollita* [reboiled soup]?”

Francesca answers, “Yes, I know it but I don’t cook it. We make one soup called *pancotto* [which Patrizia says is a soup of the poor, to use leftover bread]. We put stale bread in the water with a lot of garlic and *gli odori* and just a little bit of tomato sauce. . . . This may be the same thing as *minestra di pane*.” But these were the extent of regional borrowing in a typical family, even from a distinctive cuisine a short distance away.

Italian regionalism fosters pride that is reflected in restaurants that serve foods made with local recipes and ingredients. But if you ask for dishes from a different region you may be courting disaster (and showing your ignorance). For example, we were once hungry for *caprese* (mozzarella, tomato, fresh basil, and olive oil) on a hot day in Venice; the waiter shrugged his shoulders and brought a dish of rubbery cheese, hard tomatoes, and a sprinkling of dried basil. Rome, where *caprese* is at home (its more precise point of origin is Capri, off the coast of Naples), was only two hundred miles to the south, but the two hundred miles were regional universes apart. For a Venetian to bother about or care about making a Roman specialty when they have their own food worlds made no sense at all.

There are, however, exceptions to this rule. When melons are ripe, *prosciutto con melone*, that is, thin slices of *prosciutto* layered over slices of cantaloupe, can be happily eaten in virtually every place I’ve been in northern Italy. There is pizza everywhere, of course, but aficionados insist that only in Naples is there the *right* flour for the crust, the *right* tomatoes that make the sauce, the local mozzarella from nearby buffalo herds, and even local basil and oil, local, to make it correctly.

So there are pan-Italian dishes, and perhaps more and more of them. (The countervailing tendency is seen on signs in Venice that read, in English, no LASAGNA: DO NOT ASK. It is not a hundred miles from the region where lasagna is king.)

With these briefly introduced ideas about regionalism, we visit the kitchens and dining rooms of our eclectic gourmands (regional in orientation and passionate about it), and then the homes of those who choose and mix regional cuisines out of necessity (eclectic pragmatists).

ECLECTIC RITUALISTS

		LEVELS OF COMMITMENT	
		<i>Ritualistic</i>	<i>Pragmatic</i>
FOCUS	<i>Traditional (local; regionalism)</i>		
	<i>Eclectic (pan-Italian)</i>	Maria and Costantino Clara Egeria Silvia uno Isabella	

Eclectic ritualists take food very seriously, but the whole cuisine of Italy is their universe. In Maria's dinner parties we experienced eclectic ritualism. Maria and Costantino are by no means unique, and the growing wealth and cultural sophistication of Italians clearly leads more middle- and upper-class people to similar forms of cultural consumption. Clara, for example, served us dishes and tastes from several parts of Italy, including a dish of her own creation. But surely the most extreme form of eclectic ritualism was manifested by Egeria, a gourmet from one of the leading families of Bologna.

RITUAL ECLECTICISM: DINNER WITH EGERIA

Patrizia and I were invited to a party she hosted for twenty guests. It took place in her mansionlike home filled with heirlooms and original art, in the most fashionable neighborhood of Bologna.

The food was planned and prepared by Egeria, with help from her full-time servant, and additional help was hired for the evening. The dinner was to celebrate her husband Ugo's recent recovery from malaria, contracted on

a hunting trip to Africa. Aside from Patrizia and me, the guests were doctors and hospital administrators and a few other members of the upper bourgeoisie of Bologna. The menu was distributed to the guests beforehand, with verses Egeria included to cue tastes and senses of the dinner. Each menu was a small book, with a hand-painted watercolor of a mosquito on the cover.

To the recovered friend . . . [This is the title of a poem by the Italian poet Ugo Foscolo (1812), whose given name Egeria's husband shares.]

Prelude
Herb pie
Pheasant soup in the Avignon fashion
Tagliatelle of roe deer with the fragrance of the field
Pheasant in *escavece* on a bed of lettuce
Sorbetto in the *taffenmusik* fashion
Wild duck with potato croquettes
Bavarian cream with Vignola cherries

Herb pie or family pie

The herb pie is part of our small family tradition. My mother learned it when, as a young bride, she went to Bardi (a village in Emilia-Romagna, near Parma, where her grandfather had lived). When we moved to Parma, the herb pie continued to be one of the highlights in the family celebrations.

After I was married, when I visited my mother, alone or with my daughters, there was the herb pie, and only she was able to make it. At a certain time, perhaps one or two years before she died, she decided that it was time to teach someone else to make it, and thus she taught it to me.

So now, when the girls come back from a trip, the herb pie must be there, and this is absolutely essential for Maria, the oldest daughter. For Christmas, the herb pie as entrée is obligatory.

And then comments are made about how it came out, and the most one can say is "It is almost good as grandmother's!" My mother was clearly conscious that I never could equal her.

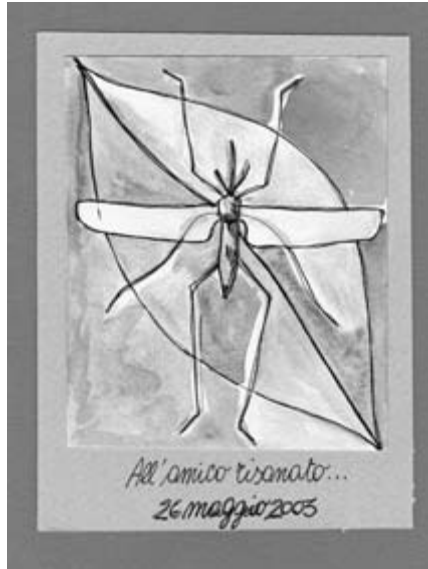
It is dedicated to the friends who are coming into the affections circle of this house today . . .

Pheasant soup in the Avignon fashion

The basis of the dish comes from a kindness of Arezzo bishop Tarlazzi to the papal residence in Avignon.

The recipe has been changed here and there, seeking extra softness for the filleted pheasant breast in the soup and indulging in the ascetic sensuality suggested by the holy wine.

It is dedicated to Michele la Placa [a guest, a well-known professor of medicine], who, as good emeritus, will be able to appreciate what the cardinals do not disdain.



Each guest received a hand-painted menu with dedications accompanying the list of dishes. Original is in color, about 8×5 inches.

Pheasant in the escabece fashion

[*Escabece* derives from the Spanish word *escabeche*, which translates as “in salmi.” This is a way to cook wild game, marinating it in wine for a considerable length of time and then cooking them in a savory sauce with herbs.]

Argentinians taught me to cook the pheasant in the escabece fashion.

Home-grown pheasant with an international recipe; here the result.

It is dedicated to Francesco Chiodo [another guest who also was a well-known professor of medicine], terrible exterminator of those treacherous microscopic little creatures that know no boundaries [the parasite that carries malaria].

Wild Duck with Vignola Cherries

On the wings of the fall wind

One hears the acute cry

Of the wild duck

KINO TOMANGA, JAPAN, 909

It seemed banal to force this poetic bird, so absolutely beautiful, so free and at the same time available to its domestic bonds, into the triviality of the *Cannard à l'Orange*.

The cherry is an illustrious fruit of our territory, and it could be suitable for a bird that flies so famously. [Vignola is a village between Bologna and Modena, famous for its cherries.]

The dish is dedicated to the illustrious friends of the Maggiore [a hospital in Bologna] who have been able to catch, even momentarily, a restless and undisciplined drake [her husband Ugo].

Egeria hosts five or six such dinners a year but is seldom invited to any as fancy as hers. A year ago she had been to an elegant dinner in a villa in Rome, and she thinks such displays may not be so unusual in Rome. The program for the dinner had been songs “from between the wars,” another form of cultural memory.

Patrizia asked Egeria about the balance between traditionalism and eclecticism in her planning. Egeria explained, “I cook traditional Bolognese food, but since I am inundated with game from Ugo’s hunting, I often cook game or fish. On the other hand, when I cook for my family, since they do not like either game or fish, I try a menu with the old recipes from Bologna that my family loves.”

Describing our dinner, she recalls, “That night we ate a pheasant soup, and then *taglioline* with roe deer—that is a new dish I am experimenting with. In everything there is always something new: the pheasant soup comes from a recipe of a bishop, Tarlazzi is the name, who sent his cook to the court of Avignon. I changed the recipe a bit and I really think it is good. And I pay attention to the kind of wine I put in it, because it is cooked with a bit of wine. . . . I study two or three books; I see a possible mix; I try it one time at home, before the dinner with guests.”

To create dishes that draw on recipes of the past, Egeria begins with ingredients she has an idea of combining, for example, fish and chickpeas. Then she searches recipes to find unusual uses for these foods and examines classical references to tastes and recipes. The results are new recipes with classical roots. She tells us, for example, “In my opinion the balsamic vinegar and the pomegranate have a great cultural resonance, because the pomegranate is *il verde melograno dai bei vermigli in fior* [‘the green pomegranate with its beautiful vermilions in blossom,’ a line of verse by Giovanni Pascoli, Italian poet, living in 1800] and the balsamic vinegar is, in practice, a distillation of time. So I tried putting them together, and the result was a mousse to accompany the game.”

Egeria, looking at the pictures, says, “I did not know I had such a beautiful house! It is beautiful when it is full of people. Look at the dining room: There were a lot of people!”

Partizia asks, “What were the reasons for that dinner? Who was invited and why?”

“Ugo, my man, got malaria and all these doctors helped him . . . [laughing], I don’t know if they helped him get over the illness or if he got over the illness despite all these doctors. And there were other friends who contributed to his recovery.”

Patrizia asks, “Did they all know each other?”

"No, not all of them. There were two categories: from one side the doctors—they all knew each other. And there were some entrepreneurs who did not know each other. For example, Mr. Gualandi, who is the owner of an important factory, and Mr. Cantelli Forti, who is a dean in the medical school. Another entrepreneur was Mr. De Berardinis, who is the director of an important chain of stores."

"When you invited them," Patrizia asks, "how did you imagine combining the people?"

"There was a similarity of interests and cultures, and so there was no possibility of friction, because there were no contrasting interests. They were people of the same age and of the same cultural level."

"Whose idea was the printed and hand-painted menu?"

Egeria answers, "It was my idea, and it is an idea that goes back ten years, so it is an established idea. I do it when I have an important dinner."

Patrizia asks if she writes a menu with dedications for family dinners, and Egeria answers, "No, never! My family makes fun of me; they do not like this kind of thing! My daughters are not my 'aficionados'; they think it is all quite ridiculous."

"This began when I had some friends from Rome staying for two days. So I had to think of a different way to entertain them, and I got the idea of writing the menu and presenting the dishes so one can see the affinities between a dish and a person. So when I think about the menu, I think of the guests I'm going to invite, and I prepare food that is related in a certain way to those persons. For example, if I invite a person coming from south Italy, I'll prepare something that has some Mediterranean allusions, and of course I'll express this relation in the written menu."

Patrizia asks, "And what were the dedications of that night?"

"The game," Egeria answers, "because Ugo got the malaria hunting in Africa. There was the duck, dedicated to the doctors who succeeded in keeping, for some brief time, that restless drake still . . ."

"Who did the art on the covers of the menus?" Patrizia asks.

Egeria answers, "A friend of mine, who is a lecturer at the university, likes to do these things. I asked her to draw a big mosquito."

"Were you pleased with the outcome?"

"Yes, very much. I am always satisfied; I don't know if the guests are satisfied too, [but] they look like it."

"Did the overall menu create the food experience you hoped for?"

"Yes," Egeria says, "there were no mistakes. I check to make sure there are no mistakes, even regarding the service. Yes, I liked that dinner."

"Do you feel the food was appreciated and understood?"

"I don't know." Egeria says. "The guests are always enraptured and full of

compliments. But I don't know if they say the same thing at every dinner they are invited to."

"To be polite?"

"Exactly."

"Trust me," Patrizia says, "the food was excellent. I still remember the pheasant soup!"

Looking at the photos, Patrizia asks, "Did you want such a big dining room in your house?"

Egeria: "Yes, I wanted it. Actually, I considered making an opening between the dining room and the living room, and the architect suggested that we keep it separate. In this way, when we finish eating we move to another room and close the door without needing to clean up. That table is a single piece of wood; from eighteen to twenty-two people can sit at my table."

"Well, to make such a dining room one has to have in mind using it!"

Egeria: "Yes. I am used to hosting people, even because of family tradition. My father was a lawyer in a small village, and when people like other lawyers or judges arrived, they were invited for dinner. I took this habit from my family, even though when I got married I was not able to cook."

Ritualists, either traditional or pragmatic, have a strong interest in food. Certainly Egeria's dinner party went far beyond what most people would or could create or devote themselves (and their financial resources) to. Transforming food in this way has generated a kind of tourism in Italy, as I was startled to discover. When I was searching the Internet to find research restaurants in Bologna, there was my host Egeria on a Web site advertising fine family eating that may be purchased by the informed tourist. The site reads, in part,

All Italians remember fondly the delicious, comforting dishes of childhood cooked by their mothers, grandmothers, or other relatives. Today restaurant food has become overly processed and bland, and it's hard to find those soothing dishes we grew up with unless we have learned to cook ourselves. The Association for the Guardianship and Protection of the Traditional Culinary-Gastronomic Heritage of Italy is trying to revive interest in the home cooking of traditional housewives by creating a project called "Home Food." Aided by a University of Bologna professor, Egeria Di Nallo, the Home Food project allows guests to experience dinners in the homes of Italian housewives who have been specially chosen to provide an authentic Italian experience.

The traditional cooks are known as *Cesarine*, or "empress of the kitchen." . . . They must have excellent cooking skills and know the traditional recipes of a region of Italy that is represented; they must also have enough space for guests and be able to make the guests feel welcome in their homes.

ECLECTIC RITUALISM: DINNER WITH EGERIA



Egeria reads the first dedication as we eat *antipasti* in the living room.



The dining room is ready!



Egeria's cook prepares the dinner, with the help of a cook hired for the evening.



Harper is photographed by a guest.



First plate of pasta, "*tagliatelle* of roe deer with the fragrance of the field."



Guests are served by a help staff hired for the party.



We relax between courses as violinists from the Bologna Orchestra entertain us.



As we finish dinner a final dedication is read.



Smokers retire to the sitting room.

Guests who want to experience an “event” must apply to become a partner of the project and undergo a questionnaire and recommendation process and also pay an enrollment fee. . . .

A dining event can be held in the home of the *Cesarine* or at another place such as a local farm, a historic building such as a castle, or a museum. During the event, the guests are taken on a “journey,” in which explanations are given as to the origin of the recipes used and how the recipes have evolved from simple to complex in various social settings. Different settings for the dinners are used to illustrate the evolution of recipes and menus, and the cultural aspects of dining are emphasized, such as music, dinnerware, and decor. The project has set four different levels for a journey, and they include the categories of Popular, Family/Bourgeois, Refined, and Aristocratic. . . .

Menus revolve around what the project has designated to be “typical products,” such as locally grown fruit and vegetables, cheeses or olive oils produced in that region, or local wines. . . . Guests who experience the meals are treated to not just a delicious, authentic multi-course Italian meal, but also get to learn about the history of the food and how it was prepared, socialize with the other guests, and bask in the hospitality of the gracious host or hostess. Past events have included such menus as medallions of eggplant, pizza rustica, and orange and almond tart in Naples to duck casserole, chicken in aspic, and sorbetto in Bologna. Events are given descriptive titles, such as “From the Renaissance Court”; “The Tastes of the Hunt” and “Quoting Artusi, from a house amongst the plane trees.”⁵

It is startling to imagine purchasing what I experienced at Egeria’s home. But from a more generous perspective this may represent an ideal operation of the market: two parties coming together to sell and buy an authentic Italian family culinary experience. I’m sure Egeria and other *Cesarine* enjoy representing Italy in this way, and the enterprise is surely profitable. Were I a new visitor to Italy or less lucky in my friendships, I would gladly pay to enter the homes of these skilled Italian cooks.

Researching regional wines and foods is a typical activity of the ritualistic eclectic. Our conversations with Costantino show the depth of knowledge of an Italian we would refer to as an eclectic ritualist.

“Well, as my wife says,” Costantino begins, “I never am on vacation. So if I go to a certain place, it is impossible for me not to buy the best typical products of that zone. This is not limited to the wines. For example, if I go—as I did in my last trip—to the Basilicata region, I buy everything is characteristic of that place. We Italians have some places—like the Langhe [a zone in the Piemonte region], where I went last December—where you can find many great wines, and also a special capon and the *Carrù* fat beef that you can find only there. So when we go on vacation, we put together an artistic vision—because in all these places there are wonderful historic towns and local products. We have a seasonal cuisine. At this time of year, we look for mushrooms, chestnuts, or truffles, and

we would never do that on April. So this influences where we chose to travel. As we travel we visit fairs, important and beautiful architectural centers, and natural settings of great beauty, always looking for food and other products.

"We are not Russia," Costantino continues, "expanded along eighty thousand kilometers of plains. We are full of up and down, coasts, gulfs, mountains. And we are full of historical places, so that our way of traveling is always linked to something more. So the idea to go to a place—for example the Langhe—and buy, at the same time, the Barolo wine, the *Carrù* fat beef, the truffles, the mushrooms, the almond nougat, the hazelnuts, and the capon is, for us, a classic before-Christmas trip. Or if we go to another place, we can find, for example, a typical cheese that you can taste and buy. And another thing: we also visit restaurants that cook typical local products. I mean, we don't conceive of an international cuisine. If you come to Bologna, you eat the typical dishes: tortellini and roasted or boiled meat. Nobody comes here to eat, for example, fish. In our culture, if you go to Chioggia [Veneto region, on the seaside] you will eat fish by instinct. I would never eat tortellini and boiled meat in Chioggia."

For eclectic ritualism to work, rules that define food and wine combinations must be preserved. Eclecticism is practiced in the context of structure. Costantino continued: "We have, in our culture, all the kinds of wine that one can find anywhere. We have light and the strong red wines; we have rosé; we have structured white wines; we have the raisin wines; and we have those terrific Italian wines like the Moscato di Asti that are lightly sweet, because of a processing that makes it gentle. The Moscato di Asti is an example of a sweet wine you can easily drink fresh in summer, even though we usually drink it for Christmas, because in the first production of the year, the Moscato that comes out has an excellent taste of fruit. One thing we Italians, and myself, normally avoid is accepting the idea of 'any wine goes.' I mean, if I come to your place for dinner, even if you are less expert in wines than I am, you'll never accompany a braised meat with a white wine. It is a cultural matter, we have it inside us. For example, in my ancient culture of the Po Valley, people made white and light sparkling wines to accompany sweets, because our sweets were dry cakes that dried out the mouth, so the wine was useful in this way. But people had never served a cake with a red wine . . ."

Costantino's knowledge, as is clear from the discussion above, is extensive and nuanced. But it is not unique. There are others who know food as well as he does, and the regional variations found in cheese and olive oils (to name but two foods) are nearly as developed as they are in wine. These foods vary tremendously from region to region, and abundance means that there is little practical reason to move them across the country (there are exceptions, such as *parmigiano* from Emilia-Romagna, which is famous across the country and

also travels well). But beyond the obvious food differences, there are thousands of recipes and food combinations that produce new tastes with the same ingredients, and these are all fodder for the traveling gourmand.

ECLECTIC PRAGMATISTS

		LEVELS OF COMMITMENT	
		<i>Ritualistic</i>	<i>Pragmatic</i>
FOCUS	<i>Traditional (local; regionalism)</i>		
	<i>Eclectic (pan-Italian)</i>		Vito and Libera Stefy Lucia and Franco Giorgio and Bassano Dani and Marina Giovanna

We call the people in our final category, the lower right cell of our table, *eclectic pragmatists*. They have some of the most interesting issues to resolve: they may regard food in a practical way, but they are faithful Italians, eating as directed by the culture. We note, as above, that the line separating ritualistic from pragmatism is more a matter of degree than of absolute separation; Vito and Libera, for example, are very close to the ritualist, and others very far away. Some people belong between the categories; likely Giovanna occupies this liminal place.

There are three reasons for eclectic pragmatism among the people we studied: cross-region marriage, migration, or new tastes, habits, or concerns for health have led to eating patterns that draw on the foods of different regions.

There were several couples in our study in which the partners came from different regions, and the foods they brought into the marriage were different enough from their spouse's cuisine that it affected their life together. Franco and Lucia were most interesting in this regard; Franco, a northerner from a rice-based culture, married Lucia, who was born in the ill-fated African Italian colonies in the 1930s and was subsequently raised in the Italian south. They share a harmonic domestic scene, but Franco misses his northern specialties. Lucia is able to make risotto, for example, but admits that she does not like it very much and seldom makes it. So it is up to Franco to make his own foods.

This may seem like a little thing, but in a society where tastes are so im-

portant, it is not. Park, quoted in the opening of the chapter, noted that divorce increases as the geographic distance between the home places of spouses increases. He suggests that this is because the new husband wants his wife to reproduce the tastes his mother created for him, and the farther one travels in Italy, the more different are these basic tastes.

Franco and Lucia have adopted the Bolognese cuisine, accented with southern dishes. That was the menu for the lunch they served me. From my vantage point, it was a ideal compromise, with heavy Bolognese cuisine moderated by lighter southern fare. The creamy risottos of northern Italy are succulent, but it seems that unless you have grown up with them you do not seek them out. That was Franco's issue.

Stefy's challenges are more complicated. She married into a traditional Bolognese family, and her parents-in-law expect traditional Bolognese food when they dine together. She cooks Bolognese food with enthusiasm, and she may be tacitly competing with her mother-in-law in the process. She prepares tortellini, but it is not homemade; she cannot make *sfoglia*. Her compromise is to purchase them in a shop that sells homemade pastas.

We ask Stefy, "How do you combine your desire to eat recipes from other regions in Italy with your father-in-law's resistance to eating foods from outside Bologna?"

She answers, "I have my opinions and he has his. When he comes for dinner, I want him to eat what he likes, and I try to make him happy by cooking traditional dishes. If I have friends for dinner, or if I prepare a special dinner for my husband and myself, maybe I cook differently."

Stefy is also highly motivated to cook healthy food, defined in Bologna as food lower in fat and calories than the normal fatty diet. She remembers her grandmother's Lombardian food and re-creates her recipes. She likes tastes from several regions of Italy and loves to bring things together in her day-to-day menus. Some of these found their way to the lunch she prepared for me.

Piergiorgio attended a lecture I delivered at the university and later invited me for lunch. Stefy, whom I met that day for the first time, prepared a lunch that featured several tastes of Italy. It began with *dadini di mortadella* (*dadini* means dice); small cubes of mortadella stuck with toothpicks. Both Piergiorgio and Stefania are on diets, so they welcomed the excuse to eat their treasured Bolognese *antipasti*.

We picked at the rich meat and made an effort to save our appetites for the several courses that awaited us.

The first course was *spaghetti alla chitarra al sugo di pomodoro e olive nere*, translated as "homemade spaghetti, cut with a tool that looks like a guitar,

ECLECTIC PRAGMATISM: LUNCH WITH STEFY AND PIERGIORGIO



Their elegant flat is decorated with modern art posters and Italian reproductions.



Stefya shows us her southern pasta.



Bread from the local bakery, served with the pasta. The next photo in the lunch sequence is on the opposite page.



We finished with pastries from the local bakery.



The second plate was cured beef (*bresola*) from northwestern Italy, home region of Stefy's grandmother. It was served with greens and small wedges of *parmigiano* and sautéed with lemon.

served with a sweet tomato sauce and black olives.” This was one of the first times I had eaten artisan-produced pasta, and they were tender and tasty. The sauce was made from a specific variety of fresh tomatoes with onion, olive oil, and basil. It was lightly spiced and spare.

The second plate, *bresola con rucola e grana*, is cured beef in the *prosciutto* method, served with the *rucola* and small grainy wedges of *parmigiano*. The *bresola* is dark red with almost no marbling and has a texture like suede. It had been marinated in lemon juice with herbs, producing a nice tartness.

For dessert we snacked on assorted sweets from a local bakery. We shared wine I had brought.

Later Stefy studied the photos with Patrizia: “I would define it as a quite nourishing dinner, because it contained a dish of pasta, a second with meat, and vegetables. I would not define it as a particularly formal dinner, that is, it did not follow the traditional cuisine of Bologna. And there was a precise reason: the guest was an American, and I wanted him to taste something different from the Bologna dishes he already knew.”

Patrizia asked, “Is your knowledge of Italian regional cuisine quite broad?”

“My knowledge is not limited to Bolognese cuisine,” Stefy answered, “and perhaps this derives from the fact that my mother comes from Lombardia, so I grew up eating dishes from that region. I ate dishes from Lazio and other regions, so I am used to other tastes. My grandmother loved to cook, and she cooked every kind of dish, just for her own pleasure—dishes from Piemonte, like *tortelloni* stuffed with pumpkin, or desserts from Sicilia, just to see how they came out. So I am used to different tastes, and I also like to experiment with new tastes. For example, when I go to a restaurant, I prefer to eat dishes from other regions.”

Stefy’s orientation to Italian food represents her background, prior to moving to Bologna, and a natural curiosity. At the basis of her orientation to food is the desire to eat in a healthy way, low on calories and fat. In these orientations she may represent a growing segment of Italian culture.

Modern Italy has been marked by two patterns of migration, both of which affected the national cuisine. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, more than five million Italians emigrated, primarily to the United States, and they brought their cuisines, which we continue to appreciate. In the post–World War II era there was extensive migration from the underdeveloped south to the industrial north, and this brought the pizza and other southern dishes to regions of Italy where they had been largely unknown. One family in our study, Vito and Libera, represents this south-north migration, and their family cuisine continues to develop the tastes of both of these regions.

Their eating habits reflect the typical ambivalence between the north and south in Italy. The cuisine of the south is considered to be less sophisticated, and Vito notes that he no longer can eat the acidic olive oils of the south. Libera told us how she brought homemade tortellini from Bologna to her southern relatives, only to be told that they could easily buy tortellini in their local supermarkets. They did not appreciate the superiority of the artisan production from a regional center.

Yet many of the dinners that Libera prepared had southern origins. We were eating *pasta al forno* (a casserole with meatballs, pasta, and cheese), and Vito said: "This is an old dish from south Italy. It is one dish where you can put everything you have on hand, including leftovers—for example, if one has some leftover meat. Before there were fridges, these were the only dishes that could be preserved. You can cook this dish on Friday and eat it on Sunday. In the past, people went to the country or to the seaside on Sundays, taking, besides the children, a pan with a ready-made dish such as this."

Pino adds: "Nowadays too!"

"Yes," his father says, "nowadays too. Anyway, it is an age-old custom. And it is a complete dish—always the same pasta, which is textured with ridges and keeps the sauce well. If it were smooth, the sauce would slide, going to the bottom of the pan. And there is sausage, but aged rather than fresh. It is the typical dish of Calabria."

Scarcity in southern cooking led to a vegetable-rich diet; the lack of a dairy culture led to cheeses made from sheep and goat milk; a climate that was kind to hard wheat, along with a lack of eggs, produced leaner pastas. Because meat is expensive in the south, it is used more as a garnish than as a main course. At the same time, the hot and sunny climate produces tastier tomatoes and other vegetables. Northerners seeking a leaner diet look to the south, while maintaining their general prejudices against the region. Some of those we interviewed, increasingly conscious of health and preoccupied with slimness, created practical cuisines based on pan-Italian resources. That was certainly the case with Bassano and Giorgio, who served us leaner dishes than the typical Bolognese diet would offer and are both trim. In these ways our subjects were pragmatically eclectic.

The effect of social class on the orientations to food we have described can be summed up very simply. If we simply separate our sample into "working classes" and "professional classes," we find working-class families to generally be traditionalists, whether ritualistically (Side) or pragmatically (Barbara/Carlo). The ritualistic eclectics were all of the professional class; they had the resources and cultural awareness to transform food into almost a fetish. The

pragmatic eclectics included both working- and service-class families, such as Bassano and Giorgio, and several professional families that enjoyed eclectic tastes of Italy but did not pursue them with a passion. It may have been necessity forced by marriage, or it may have been the search for a healthier diet, but the result was a creative mixing of interesting tastes.

Our cultural map organizes much of what we learned. It could be the basis of a large research project, based on surveys and more broadly based observations. For we are studying nothing less than passion and practicality, narrowly defined cultures and those that reach outward. Studies made simultaneously in several regions would show us a great deal about how Italian culture is evolving, slowly and quickly, in several directions simultaneously.

With this we move to our *digestivo*. We have taken you to the homes and kitchens of typical Bolognese; we have presented the foods we ate there in part as a result of thousands of years of Italian history. We have remembered struggles and poverty and noted the peculiar ability Italians seem to have to improvise in the face of difficulty to produce an admired cuisine. We have balanced an appreciation of the local and regional with the national, and we have happily celebrated the Italian food world. We offer a first step in understanding a cultural treasure, which may teach something about how to enrich our lives and act with greater kindness for the planet. All is not perfect in the world of Italian cuisine, but much is very right. *Buon appetito!*

Digestivo

WHEN DOUG HARPER PROPOSED HIS RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE ITALIAN culture of food, I thought it could be an interesting topic from the point of view of an American sociologist but surely not very stimulating for me, being Italian. Further, I am aware that the Italian culture of food has been (and continually is) studied by Italian scholars coming from different disciplines. They have examined it in its various aspects, showing its complex nature, its historical origins, its regional traditions, and its meaning as an object of consumption and exchange. What else could an American sociologist have to tell and discover about it?

With a quite skeptical attitude, I agreed to help Doug in his project, both because I did not want to be unkind and, principally, because I knew and appreciated his previous work and his research methods. “Who knows,” I thought, “maybe something good could develop!”

Besides my early skepticism, I must confess I entered the project almost having a superior attitude, as if to say: “Yes, it’s important that you Americans, frequenters of McDonald’s, learn what eating well means!”

So the project began, and the role I mentally carved out for myself was as aide-de-camp. I would organize the research dinners; I would be Doug’s interpreter; I would help him collect the interviews. But things did not go that way.

In the first phase of the work, as we discussed the cultural aspects of Italian food and not just the food, I realized I was not able to answer many questions that “Doug-the-why-guy” was asking me. Not only I was not able to answer, but they were questions I had never asked myself.

Why can one not drink cappuccino after lunch or dinner?

Doug asked me this question when he saw the expression of disgust appearing on my face the first time he ordered a cappuccino after having eaten

a dish of *tagliatelle* with *ragù*. And I became confused. Why can you not do it? Is it a digestive problem? If so, what about tiramisu? What about *panna cotta*? They are made of milk and heavier than a cappuccino, and we eat them for dessert. So? The only thing I was able to tell him was “It’s just an Italian people’s thing!” But this is not an answer.

Actually, I don’t know why we cannot drink cappuccino after a meal; I just know that we don’t do it, and that’s all.

Why, at least in my region, can one eat *maccheroni* with *ragù* but not spaghetti? I know there is a problem linked to sauce that slides from the pasta, but why does even the idea terrify us?

Why one must drink beer with pizza and never wine?

Sure, why? I’m still asking myself about it, and I did not find any answers; I just know that one can’t do it, and that’s all.

My reaction to these unanswerable questions was almost annoyance. At the beginning, the rules seemed obvious to me, as when Doug has asked me why one can’t go when the traffic light is red (which Italian people do more often than ordering wine with pizza).

Why can we not invert the order of the courses in a dinner? Why can we not serve pasta as a side dish?

I gave vague and not very convincing answers to Doug’s questions. Beer is better than wine with pizza. But why? Because it is. Because that is the rule. And I began to realize that Doug’s questions referred to internalized norms, to aspects of my own culture I had always taken for granted.

The “why-guy” phase made me look at my taken-for-granted assumptions in a different way; it made me look for rules behind ostensible casualness. That is, I began to consider my alimentary habits from a Goffmanian perspective. Drinking a cappuccino after a meal means breaking a rule. I was realizing that food in Italy is not just a matter of quality and taste. Eating is a normative behavior, and sometimes the norms are very rigid, nearly dogmatic—and one cannot explain a dogma.

So Doug’s questions forced me to search for answers that were not limited to sentences like “Because it’s better. Because it works this way.” And then I realized I was really entering the project; I was beginning to look at my culture with the eyes of an outsider. The discussions between Doug and me began leading us to reflect on the ritualistic and symbolic aspects of Italians’ behavior toward food.

Afterward, as the research dinners went on, with the open conversations and the semistructured interviews, Doug asked me new questions, emerging from and grounded in the research work itself.

Why do Italian mothers prepare dishes for their sons (and sometimes their daughters) to take home? I never asked myself this question. I took for granted

that when I had lunch at my mother's and she prepared a cake, it was split in two parts, one to eat as dessert and the other, wrapped, for me to take home. It was so normal! Similarly, it was normal to go to the home of friends for dinner and discover that the excellent *ragù* we were eating was made by our host's mother. It was so normal that none of us never asked questions about it.

In contrast, Doug, belonging to a culture where this behavior is not normal, asked why. So we were trying to understand what else the food was a symbol of, which kind of mother-son relationship it underlined. In other words, we were trying to understand its implications in terms of love and power.

Doug's questions went on. Why are meetings among friends usually for dinner and not after dinner?

As usual, I did not have a ready answer. I was wondering: why, when I feel like seeing my friends, I never imagine inviting them to have a cup of coffee or a drink, but I invite them for dinner? Why do my friends not invite me for a cup of coffee or a drink, but they invite me for dinner? Why, ultimately, does seeing friends mean eating together?

The only answer that came to my mind was an emotional one: because it seems to me that seeing my friends *after* dinner would be a sad, cold, and incomplete thing.

There is an Italian saying: "One will not become old around a table." In effect, Italian people spend a lot of time around the table with friends, but not to remain young. Again, Doug and I had to reason in terms of love and exchange—sharing a thing (food) that maintained a strong symbolic and ritualistic meaning.

Here I must open a parenthesis: Even if much of Italians' social life occurs around a table, it does not mean they don't go to the cinema, the theater, the *osteria* [wine bar], or the pub. These places in Italy are always crowded. What is significant, and was confirmed by our research, is that the most important relationships are held together and strengthened by sharing food. People eat together to stay together, to talk, to confirm the nature of their relationship. People go to the cinema to watch a film.

Now a second parenthesis. Teenagers and young adults' behavior seems to adhere to different rituals. For them, the privileged time for socializing is time spent out of the house (but they don't have their own house yet!). Italian young people meet in pubs, *osterie*, and discos, and they are more similar to their peers in other countries than to their parents. Even their relation to alcohol is more similar to the North European or North American way than to the Italian one. The juvenile world is a different planet, as sociologists well know. The subjects of our research, on the other hand, are people, some of them young, who already have their own family and have emerged from that provisional phase of life that is the path toward full adulthood. It would be interesting to

observe the behavior of today's globalist Italian young people in ten or fifteen years, when they live with their own new families.

Let's go on with Doug's questions. Why do Italian families make a great effort to eat together at least once a day? Would it not be more convenient if everyone followed her or his own pace and schedule? Yes, I answered, it would be more convenient. But in this case I knew the answer: dinner is the time when family members can talk each other, telling what happened during the day, revealing their problems, and making decisions. It is the only moment the family dedicates entirely to itself, before everyone returns to her or his business. Once again, in my (and our subjects') words, the symbolic and ritualistic meanings of food emerged.

Why, Doug went on, in a Western industrial country, as Italy is, where most women are in the labor market, are the domestic workloads related to shopping and cooking still mostly on women's shoulders?

This was a good question, but I was not unprepared for it. Maybe Doug at that time did not know that in Italy not only the work related to food but indeed the entire domestic workload is on women's shoulders. This is the big contradiction in the lives of Italian women, well known by sociologists of family. The emancipation of women in Italy brought about a change in the power relations within the couple, but it was mostly related to the decision-making sphere. Partners decide together about the important choices of their life. However, the emancipation did not modify the roles connected to the division of domestic labor. Sociologists describe the phenomenon with the concept of "double presence." The woman works both in the labor market and in the house, and in so doing her work is doubled.

Anglo-Saxon women made different choices. Once engaged in the labor market, they tried to diminish domestic work, making other family members aware of their responsibilities. In the process, mealtimes lost part of their symbolism and importance. On the contrary, Italian women continued running the household and doing most of the management of food (and paying a cleaning woman for the rest, when possible). They did not want to abdicate the symbolic power of food, through which they maintain control of their families. And Italian men did not fight to share this power, for they find it natural that their wives play the same role as their mothers did. For them this equates less work, a little bit less power, but more love and more good food!

I must admit, as a woman, that we ourselves are one of the main causes of our "double presence." Clearly, the symbolic meaning of food is too strong and too intrinsically linked to power and love to even put its relinquishment into discussion.

At the end of this research work, there are two things I can say.

First, this book does not contain just the research of an American scholar on Italian food. It also contains the results of an intercultural encounter, in which both the outsider and the insider gave and took something. Each of them learned something of the other's culture and something of their own. The differences, when examined, served to help each better understand the other.

Second, what I just said shows that this book is not only addressed to an American but also to an Italian public. Just as I was not able to answer Doug's questions regarding my own culture, our subjects were not able to answer them, and most Italian people do not know the answers either.

As sociologists, we are used to studying behaviors and attitudes that are part of our culture, but usually we study what we don't consider normal. It's only if we look at "normal" behaviors with the eyes of an outsider that we see what lies behind what we take for granted.



Patrizia, foreground; behind, from left, Rita, Isabella, and Clara

Cibo per la mente (Food for Thought)

THE FIRST TIME I WAS IN BOLOGNA, SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE I MET PATRIZIA, I was attending a conference and had taken a room in the center city, at the old Palace Hotel. The streets are a labyrinth; there are seven turns to get to the piazza from the hotel, though it is only a couple of blocks away. Most other conference attendees stayed out of town near the conference center; I felt like a real adventurer, my first time in Italy.

One night I was walking back to the hotel across the piazza after eating for the fourth time in my familiar *trattoria*. It was after midnight and the piazza was empty—that was, except for a mysterious entourage: an elegant blonde and an Italian man next to a Rolls Royce parked illegally in the piazza. They were posing for a photographer. I sauntered over, introduced myself, and learned that the woman was Nikki from the United Kingdom and imported Italian food to Liverpool; her husband was named Giorgio; and the photographer was Francesco, a bus driver by day who wanted to be a paparazzo. By night Francesco prowled the streets of Bologna with his trusty assistant, looking for photos. He had a Pentax K-1000—not much of a camera—and a modest strobe. His assistant would place his body on the pavement so Francesco could lean against him an exaggerated way, as he'd seen photographers do in glossy magazines. He was taking photos of the Rolls and the couple, but I expected his strobe was not strong enough to light the images he was making.

When Francesco saw my Leica, he showed respect in the exaggerated way Italians can get away with: I must be a photographer. I offered him some advice as the five of us chatted and waited for the cops to banish us from the piazza. Finally Nikki asked us if we wanted to accompany her to a club, a private affair. *Perché no?* We bundled into the Rolls and I got to drive; the old box lumbered through deserted streets to a club on the outskirts of the city. We filled a table and we ate *antipasti* and we drank champagne.

We could not have been a more unusual group, yet we connected in that odd way travelers sometimes do. They bought more champagne when the club finally closed, and we drove back to the city, noisily entered the Palace, walked past the startled doorman, and found our way to my tiny room. There we sat until dawn, talking and drinking. I had a copy of a book I'd just published about the nitty-gritty life of a north country mechanic—a look inside a very small culture—and I gave it to the photographer. By that time Nikki and Giorgio were slumped together, dozing on the bed. Francesco turned the pages of the book, getting into the idea of photographing the taken-for-granted aspects of a culture rather than the moments of high fashion or news, and he turned to me and said, "You should do this here. The typical life, not the spotlights." At that moment it was an absolutely compelling idea, though I never thought it would come to fruition. Francesco, I hope you find this and remember the crazy moment the idea was planted.

They left with the light of dawn and I left Italy a day later, not really expecting to return. In the meantime I studied agriculture and environmental issues, picking up my father's life themes. But I have always been an ethnographer, and thus I study mostly how people live, not what values should guide them. I met Patrizia and we did some small studies of Italian culture, and these threads began to weave themselves together to the small fabric of culture this book represents.

I sometimes wonder if I would have embarked upon an ethnography spread across two cultures if I had known how hard it would be. Generally you do this in graduate school or with a major grant: you have a year or two of fieldwork, you learn the language, and you work under the tutelage of masters. In this case I was taking on two new subjects—Italian culture and the study of food—and I was doing it bit by bit, mostly self-financed, over several years. But Patrizia and I plunged ahead, one trip after the other; one dinner after the other. I was frustrated by my rudimentary Italian; while Patrizia's English is quite good, we don't always understand each other. Many questions were too complex to ask; they were too embedded in culture. It was also frustrating for Patrizia, who does not suffer fools gladly.

I've appreciated, however, the quality of coauthorship that developed under these conditions. Every idea has passed Patrizia's judgment, and she has directed me to drop some and take up others. I had a one-semester sabbatical a couple of years ago and spent those months on the first draft. At the end of the fall I thought I'd finished; I printed out copies and took them confidently to Bologna. Patrizia spent a day and half reading as I left for business in Rome. I came back to a stern friend with the message "Start over." Parts were right, but the overall pattern was not. We spent the next several days roughing out the outline for a new draft, and I spent the next year writing it. Again, all seemed

terrific; off it went to the publisher. This time, guided primarily by a reader's report done by a scholar of Italian culture, another reduction took place. It felt like a sauce, getting richer. During the revisions Patti and I have had gone over every line, every idea: "Is this really true? Does this tell the story you know best about your culture?" And so the book.

What seems most important, now that is finished? One idea that seems ever more compelling is the peculiar pull between structure and improvisation in Italian culture which has been behind many of the things I've observed. Tim Parks describes how his Italian neighbors pulled up their tomato plants, even as they were bearing the best fruit, because their old peasant calendar, based on the saints' days, said it was time. The structure is so strong in the culture, yet an equally strong instinct for improvisation matches it. It is as though the culture existed simultaneously at the extremes of a long continuum. It is natural for me to compare American culture as I write about another: our instinct for improvisation maybe explains why we play jazz better than any other culture and why we have the best home repair stores. But our culture lacks the discipline that structure creates, in the world of food and in other ways as well. And so food has been a great way to study these themes. We've said it again and again: the Italian templates (meals, dinners, or otherwise) are not negotiable, but the means of bringing them to life are.

The second idea I keep coming back to is how Italians can simultaneously believe that their culture is superior and at the same time be completely generous in sharing it. Said more directly: Italians *know* they are on to something when it comes to food, but they are not snooty about it; they tolerate those who disagree—"You don't want it, no problem!" Behind all the flourish and drama that is Italy, there is a very modest culture. This speaks of collective self confidence, a culturewide effusion that is genuine and appealing. They have fun with their collective life and they are pleased to share it. I do not know of another culture where I could have done this study, and I know several where I could not.

Finally, I believe the way Italians use food is good for social life, good for bodies, and good for the planet. Connecting with others over food weaves people together. People are drawn to social life, so this is a positive. The way Italians eat (notwithstanding the occasional feast) emphasizes balance and restraint. The week after I brought my class of Americans back from Italy it was Easter, and I asked them to compare what they had eaten at home to what they had eaten in Italy. The ham, they said, so much of it. Not a bad taste, but so much of it. In Italy, the same piece of the pig is made into *prosciutto*, eaten in paper-thin slices—a different universe in the complexity of tastes. You eat it

with concentration, they said, thinking about the taste, but just a little. The American ham you eat to stuff yourself.

So I keep thinking about those thirty-cow farms in Emilia-Romagna, working with co-op dairies and local ripening plants, making what many people call the best cheese in the world. It is just cows, grass, rennet, heat, and care. An overarching value that says, “This way of growing food uses human intelligence, treats animals well, makes good work, pays a living wage, and makes exquisite food in the process.” So we have *parmigiano* and *prosciutto* as ideals, but can we transform the lessons of these foods to the rest of our food universe?

Each book is a privilege, and this one maybe more than any other. *Grazie mille, Italia!*



Harper studying *mozzarella di bufala*. Photo by Patrizia Faccioli.

Glossary of Italian Terms

- aceto balsamico di Modena.** Balsamic vinegar from Modena
- alla cacciatora.** Hunter style
- alla campagnola.** Country style
- alla contadina.** Peasant style
- alla paesana.** Village style
- amaro.** Bitter, here meaning a bitter liquor
- antipasti.** Appetizer; singular form *antipasto*
- anziani.** Old ones, elders
- arborio.** A variety of rice used to make risotto
- autocoscienza.** Conciousness raising; a term commonly used by Italian feminists
- baccala.** Dried cod
- Barolo.** A village in Piemonte where a fine wine is made
- béchamel.** Flour and butter sauce
- biscotti.** Cookies
- bollito.** Boiled, cooked in water
- bruschetta.** A piece of toasted bread with garlic, oil, and (sometimes) tomato
- café e brioche.** Cup of coffee and bun, the typical Italian breakfast; in Rome *brioche* are called *cornetti*
- cannoli.** A round tubular pasta, filled with béchamel sauce, meat, and/or vegetable as a dinner dish, or used as a Sicilian dessert pastry
- canocchie.** Mantis shrimp, which resemble lobsters and are common in the Adriatic Sea
- cappelletti.** Term for tortellini used in Romagna
- cappe sante.** Scallops
- carbonara.** Cooked charcoal burner style

castagnaccio. Chestnut from Castagna

cena. Dinner

certosino. A cake typical of Christmas in Bologna and the surrounding region. The Certosino order of friars may have originally created this cake.

ciambella. A very simple cake, generally eaten with milk and coffee in the morning

cittadini. Citizens, or urban structures

colazione. Breakfast

contorni. Literally, “frame”; in a meal context, vegetables served with *secondo*

convivio. Banquet or meeting

coppa. Ham similar to *prosciutto* but less expensive as it is made with a different cut of pork, from behind the head

cotechino. Like salami, but fresh, requiring boiling before it is eaten

crescentina. Roll made of flour, water, and salt, fried in oil; eaten with a variety of cheeses and meats, even flavored lard

crostini. Toasted bread with some kind of spread

cucina povera. Poor cuisine—food made of cheap ingredients

digestivo. Liquor drunk at the end of the meal

dolce. Sweet

fare festa a qualcuno. Make a party for someone

fattoria. Farm

Festa della Statuto. A holiday, no longer observed, celebrating the Statuto, a constitution promulgated by King Carlo Alberto in 1848 (replaced in 1947 by the current constitution)

Festa di Natale. Christmas

fettuccine. Flat pasta, made with egg, such as *tagliatelle*

finocchiona. Salami with fennel seeds

frittata. Omelet

frittelle. Fritter

frizzante. Sparkling

frutta secca. Nuts such as peanuts and almonds

fusilli. A kind of pasta, short and curly

gelato. Ice cream

gnocchi. Small potato and flour balls, to be cooked in water and eaten like pasta, with a tomato sauce or just butter and sage

grappa. Wine distilled to a clear liquor

la dolce vita. The sweet life; also, a Fellini film from the late 1950s portraying the growing prosperity and cultural shallowness of Italy

la miseria. Poverty

limoncello. Liquor made from alcohol and lemons infused (not distilled), from the Amalfi coast, south of Naples

lupara. Sawed-off shotgun used by Mafia in Sicily

mangia. Eat! (imperative verb form)

Marsala. A village in Sicily, source of Marsala wine

mascarpone. A cheese with high fat content, used to prepare *dolce al mascarpone* (a dessert) but also eaten with bread, like other cheeses

mezzadria. Sharecropping system

minestre in brodo. Soup, or any first plate that is served with broth

misticanza. Mixed salad greens

molto, ma buono? A lot, but is it good? (a humorous perversion of “poco ma buono”)

mortadella. Ground meat made into the creamy salami of Bologna; the “bologna” sold in the United States is a very poor imitation

mozzarella di bufala. Mozzarella made from buffalo milk, from farms south of Naples

neonata. Literally, newborn female; in a food context, a very small fish

nocino. Liquor flavored with walnuts; usually homemade

osteria. Originally a wine bar; today an *osteria* is a kind of pub that also serves a limited variety of food

pancetta. Bacon

pancetta sanguinaccio. Cake that includes fresh pork blood, drained from a slaughtered pig; very rare nowadays

pane con formaggio. Bread and cheese

panettone. A light and airy Christmas cake consumed throughout Italy; according to legend, invented by accident when an excessive amount of yeast was used

panna cotta. Flan made of cream and vanilla

parmigiano reggiano. Famous cheese named for the provinces where it is made, Parma and Reggio Emilia

pasta al forno. Pasta with sauce, baked after being boiled

pasta e fagioli. Soup with pasta and beans

pasta verde. Pasta mixed with vegetables

pasticceria. Pastry shop

pecorino. Cheese made of sheep’s milk

pellagra. Disease caused by lack of vitamins; occurs especially in populations whose diet consists almost entirely of corn

penne all’ arrabbiata. Short pasta with a very piquant sauce; literally, angry penne

pesto. Sauce made of basil, garlic, and pecorino cheese

pippo. Colloquial term for World War II bomber

poco, ma buono. Little but good

poderi. Farmed fields

polenta. Cornflour cooked in water; leftovers are baked or fried

pranzo. Lunch

primi piatti. Soup or pasta or rice, to eat before the *secondo* (meat or fish with vegetable)

Primitivo. A dark red wine from the south of Italy

prosciutto. Cured ham

Prosecco. Champagne-type wine from northeastern Italy

ragù. Sauce made of meat and tomato and served over pasta

ricotta. Cheese made of what remains of the milk (whey) after making fat cheeses. so, it's very low in fats

risotto. A first dish made of rice cooked with vegetables, meat, or fish

risotto nero. Rice cooked with the ink of cuttlefish

rucola. Bitter vegetable used in salad

rustica. Folksy

salame. Salami

San Marzano. Tomato variety having a long shape

sfoglia. Pasta made of flour and eggs

sorbetto. Dessert made with ice, sugar, and fruit; may be served as a drink (with vodka and lemon) or as a thick ice to be eaten with a spoon

spaghetti allo scoglio. Spaghetti with seafood

spugnola. A morel (mushroom)

spumante. Sparkling wine

stridoli. A sharp-tasting leafy vegetable used in pasta dishes in Emilia Romagna; called "cowbell" in the United Kingdom

tagliatelle. Long pasta made with eggs

tagliere. Piece of wood on which sfoglia is made

tavola. Table; also refers to the social life around the table

tocai. A white wine from northeastern Italy

torrone. Christmas cake with almonds and honey

torta mantovana. A crumbly cake from Mantova, made without a leavening agent and with much butter

torte. Pie

tortellini. Egg pasta filled with meat

tortelloni. Egg pasta, bigger than tortellini, filled with cheese

tramezzi. (archaic) A dish served between *primo* and *secondo*

trattoria. Midpriced or inexpensive restaurant

trebbiano. A white wine from Romagna

umidi. Meat cooked with tomato sauce

una fame de morire. A hunger approaching death
uomo di panza. (colloquial) Big-bellied man
uomo grasso. Fat man
vin santo. A sweet wine from Tuscany
vino frizzante. A generic and inexpensive sparkling wine
zampone. Pork from pig's leg, usually boiled
zuppa povera. Poor soup (made from inexpensive ingredients)

Notes

SETTING THE TABLE

- 1 Saussure's work was published in the early twentieth century in several translations and was recently republished in English (2006).
- 2 Parks 1992, 21.
- 3 Capatti and Montanari 1991, xiv. This history of Italian cuisine is the best translated to English and perhaps the most comprehensive in Italian as well. In addition, it is a delightful read.
- 4 For those new to visual sociology, this may be a novel idea. Most of us who have worked in visual sociology have compared ourselves to documentary photography and photojournalism. Visual ethnographies are few in number, so any comparison takes some imagination. Generally visual ethnographers connect photos to theoretical ideas rather than to events. So a visual sociologist would focus on "gesture in interaction," while a photojournalist might record interactions between important Italians having an animated discussion. Still, visual sociologists often admire photojournalism and documentary photography and take many projects done in those areas as models. See Harper 2000.
- 5 Robert Levine's *Images of History* (1989) is one of the very few historical studies that derive almost entirely from historical photos. Often, however, such historical studies are directly relevant to the study of contemporary issues; this is how I used old photos in a study of social change in an agricultural community (Harper 2001). In the old days one had to travel to an archive, don cotton gloves, and leaf through thousands of images. Now much work can be done on the computer. Corbis-Bettman has purchased the rights to millions of photographs, and one can search them fairly efficiently without leaving one's office. Of course, this is a lot less fun.
- 6 See Bondanella 2001. I designed a course, "Italian Culture through Italian Film," for American students in Rome, which first led me to appreciate the connections between Italian history, culture, economy, and cinema. This connection was strongest in the post-World War II era; few contemporary Italian films have anything nearly as penetrating to say about Italy as did those from the years when the great directors—Fellini, Rossolini, Visconti, Passolini, and others—dominated the industry.

- 7 Martin Scorsese creates a historical montage of early Italian cinema, with a concentration on the 1950s and 1960s, in his excellent documentary *My Voyage to Italy* (1999). The excerpts from Italian films are lengthy, and Scorsese's commentary is informative.

FRAMES OF REFERENCE

- 1 Albert Sonenfeld, preface to Capatti and Montanari 2003, xiv.
- 2 Capatti and Montanari 2003, 2.
- 3 Mary Ella Milham's 1998 translation is the most recent.
- 4 Buford 2006, 108.
- 5 Ibid., 111.
- 6 Capatti and Montanari 2003, 18–20.
- 7 Artusi 1891. After many Italian reprintings, the book was published in 1996 in English and has had several subsequent publications in translation.
- 8 Helstosky 2004, 27.
- 9 Caggiano 2001. This is an excellent guide to recipes we sampled in the course of this study.
- 10 Downie 2002, xvii.
- 11 Giacosa 1992, 2–16.
- 12 Davis 1927, 104. William Stearns Davis is but one of several wonderful sources on ancient Rome. See also Carcopino 1940/1970.
- 13 Davis 1927, 105.
- 14 Ibid., 103.
- 15 Downie 2002, xvii.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 See Black 2000, 16–31, 43–62, for an extensive discussion of the agricultural systems in early modern Italy. See also Ginsborg 1990b, 23–25. Both of these authors show the complexity of the arrangements and their many forms. Sydel Silverman (1975) spent a year doing her dissertation research in a hilltop town in central Umbria that was surrounded by *mezzadria* farms. Her study of the *mezzadria* system, which includes its history dating to Roman times, describes how the system operated in 1961, the time of her field research. By the time she returned a decade later, the system was nearly gone. Her research shows the sizes of farms, the arrangements between landlord and tenant, the cropping practices, and the peasant cultures that created the *mezzadria* and disappeared with its demise. Written as ethnography, her book is now history.
- 18 Counihan 2004, 36.
- 19 Silverman 1975, 58–59.
- 20 Mario Puzo's novel *The Sicilian* (1984) describes the relationship between banditry and exploitative social relationships, typically enforced by the Mafia in consort with the landlord classes. John Dickie's recent history of the Sicilian Mafia (Dickey 2004), however, warns us not to rely too heavily on this familiar explanation. Dickie points out that in Sicily organized crime became powerful in the nineteenth century by extorting landowners for protection money—to protect precious lemon crops and the agricultural infrastructure that produced them—from the Mafia! It was the vulnerability of the lemon trees, the irrigation systems, and the crops themselves that made landowners susceptible to such extortion rackets. In this case it was the landowner class that felt the pressure of organized crime.

- 21 Sonenfeld, preface to Capatti and Montanari 2003, xvii.
- 22 Helstosky 2004, 18). Many of my statements about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries draw on Helstosky's masterful history.
- 23 Ibid., 14.
- 24 Ibid., 11.
- 25 Ibid., 26.
- 26 Ibid., 15.
- 27 Counihan 2004, 59–63.
- 28 Romer 1985, 92. Her description of communal threshing evokes images of similar agricultural work rituals in rural areas. For decades communal threshing and communal gathering of other harvests integrated the farm cultures in American dairy regions. See Harper 2001.
- 29 Charles 2001 provides a good starting point for this important discussion.
- 30 Dennis Mack Smith's biography of Mussolini describes the anticonsumerist fascist ideology with which Mussolini hoped to redefine Italy (Smith 1983, see esp. 116–23).
- 31 Helstosky 2004, 64.
- 32 Ibid., 97.
- 33 Ibid., 100.
- 34 Ibid., 4.
- 35 Quoted in Counihan 2004, 41.
- 36 Ibid., 33.
- 37 Helstosky 2004, 110.
- 38 Caggiano 2001, 2.
- 39 Origo 1947/1995.
- 40 Counihan 2004, 50.
- 41 Puzo's novel, based on a true story, concerns the relationship between the Mafia, the landlord class, and land-reform-inspired banditry.
- 42 Paul Ginsborg (1990b, 435–39) charts migration patterns to show how Italians moved from the south to the north during this era.
- 43 Helstosky 2004, 139.
- 44 Ibid., 133.
- 45 Cornelisen 1976, 24.
- 46 Ibid., 5–6.
- 47 Bell 1979.
- 48 Ibid., 113–14.
- 49 Ibid., 115.
- 50 Ibid., 116.
- 51 Romer 1985.
- 52 Ibid., 92–93. The importance of the harvest meals shared by workers and family is stressed in accounts of agricultural social life, including Silverman 1975. Harvest dinners were also important memories for farmers I interviewed in northern New York, who described the world they had lost with modern mechanization (Harper 2001).
- 53 Counihan 2004, 177.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid., 180.
- 56 Veronelli 2000, 13, 18.
- 57 Bell 1979, 106.

LOVE

- 1 "Olfactory memory"—that is, memory-created smells—are important for mammals to attract mates, mark territory, hunt, find their young, avoid danger, and even gauge their attack (many animals can smell fear). Smells attract extraordinarily vivid memories in humans; we all have our examples. David E. Sutton's ethnography of food on the Greek island of Kalymnos (2001) is organized entirely around the concept of memory. Jon Holtzman notes that "the sensuality of food causes it to be a particularly intense and compelling medium for memory. The experience of food evokes recollection, which is not simply cognitive but also emotional and physical, paralleling notions such as Bourdieu's (1977) *habitus* . . . and Stoller's (1995) emphasis on embodied memories" (Holtzman 2006, 365).
- 2 Holtzman's "prospective memory" (2006) applies to many associations between sensory memory and food, including difficult memories, being forced to eat what one does not want to, and experiencing hunger or starvation.
- 3 Roland Barthes's 1981 *Camera Lucida* considers the relationship between memory and photography, inspired by an old photograph of his recently deceased mother.
- 4 Sutton (2001) shows how the memory of food may disappear across an entire culture through the process of modernization.
- 5 Ginsborg writes, "In all of Europe during the twentieth century there had been a gradual decline in the number of children being born. This trend was interrupted for the twenty years after WWII . . . but after 1965 resumed again its downward path. The case of Italy was particularly dramatic because its absolute fertility rate (average number of children per woman) had for a long time been above or around the European average, but then in just twenty years dropped to being the lowest, not in Europe but in the world. In 1970, the average number of children per woman in Italy was 2.42, around the norm for the European community; by 1980 it was 1.64; by 1990 1.30, and by 1993 1.21" (2003, 69). As a result Italian families were becoming "long' and 'thin,' with the children remaining in the home for long periods of time but fewer children. Ginsborg, summarizing research findings, notes that "this caused Italian families to express particular qualities of spatial and emotional proximity."
- 6 Citing recent research by Italian sociologists, Ginsborg notes that "much emphasis has been put . . . on the 'contractual' nature of the modern Italian family. In keeping with trends in other European countries, so it is argued, individual family members had developed a greater tendency towards freedom and autonomy. Yet in Italy this process of individualization had not, by and large, led to family ruptures, estrangements, or distances between parents and children. On the contrary: a process of negotiation, of mutual tolerance, of informal *contract* allowed children and parents to continue to live under the same roof" (2003, 76). Further, Ginsborg quotes Giuseppe De Rita, head of Italy's principal social research institute, CENSIS, who characterized the family as a "firm," the father being no longer the patriarch but one who exercises his influence to ensure functioning. "He was the guarantor . . . of 'a richer system of autonomy for the various members of the family, who do not express their freedom as divergence but rather as integration.' Thus at the very moment when the family in the West was considered in grave crisis, the Italian family, in this vision, seemed to have reached its apotheosis." De Rita's view of Italian family dynamics may be overly generous, yet it draws upon research and certainly represents the imperfectly realized ideal Italians would *like* their families to reach.

- 7 Parks 1996, 142–43.
- 8 Ibid.

POWER

- 1 Accati 1995, 242.
- 2 Ginsborg 2003, 79.
- 3 Ibid., 78.
- 4 Silverman 1975, 164. Neither Patrizia nor other Italian social scientists I questioned knew of similar antimothers rituals.
- 5 Parsons 1964. Edward Banfield (1958) used similar methods to focus on what he called “amoral familism”—a theory, simply stated, that the family culture is responsible for the backwardness of Italian peasants, rather than their culture being a product of larger economic and historical forces. Though much criticized and astonishingly ethnocentric, many of its arguments are still discussed. See Ginsborg 1990a for a convincing critique of this perspective.
- 6 Parsons 1964, 288.
- 7 Cornelisen 1976, 219.
- 8 Thomas Belmonte writes: “How they confounded me, Stefano and Elena and their children! Against such a backdrop of emotional carnage, how was I to understand the exasperating beauty of their closeness, their apparent need for one another, and the immediate sense of this group as a single, indivisible, though multicellular, organism?” (Belmonte 1979/1989, 81).
- 9 Ibid., 71.
- 10 Ibid., 80.
- 11 Goddard 1996, 188.
- 12 Paola Filipucci writes that Ernesto De Martino studied practices “marginal to official Catholicism, which he saw as relics of former belief and ritual systems.” Peasants were well aware of their marginality and thus “had a fragile sense of self, in danger of ‘floundering’ at times of crisis, like the death of kin. This condition of psychological misery particularly affected women, who were even more oppressed than men. . . . Ritualized weeping was a technique to alleviate self-destructive impulses unleashed by grief, containing psychological collapse” (1996, 61). De Martino was also one of the first Italian social scientists to use photographs in ethnography. His photos of the tarantula cult show the performance of rituals whereby men and women “are cured of recurrent spells of possession triggered by the imagined bite of a mythical spider associated with St. Paul. “The ‘dance’ is neither a physiological reaction to spider bites, nor a psychological disorder, but a culturally specific, symbolically coherent to personal crises, particularly those arising from the onset of puberty and the control of erotic desire in the context of Southern peasant society’s regulation of sexuality and marriage” (ibid., 63).
- 13 Counihan 1985; Filippucci 1996.
- 14 Friedman is quoted in Filippucci 1996, 54.
- 15 Parks 1996, 100.
- 16 Ibid., 232.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Bono and Kemp 1991, 9. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp’s 1991 collection gathers primary documents and essays on Italian feminism in the 1970s. Their 1993 volume offers

essays followed by contemporary statements. Along with Giovanna Miceli-Jeffries's *Feminine Feminists* (1994), these provide an excellent overview of the distinctiveness of Italian feminism.

- 19 Luisa Passerini describes how fascist civil code had formalized inequality between the husband and wife. Fascist laws “enshrined the husband’s dominance” to the point that the wife was obligated to “make her home with him wherever he might choose” and assigned ownership of property to him. Even adultery by the husband was legally defined as less significant than the wife’s. These laws were gradually overturned during the 1950s and 1960s and replaced with a civil code that guaranteed gender equality. The culmination of this process was the legalization of divorce and abortion in the early 1970s, after years of concerted effort on the part of Italian feminists (Passerini 1996, 145–50).
- 20 Bono and Kemp 1991, 15.
- 21 Ibid., 7–9.
- 22 Lonzi’s (1970) essay calls attention to the patriarchy of Hegel and the relevance of Marxism to feminism. It is among the first calls for the women’s movement to achieve difference, not equality, because to become equal to men would be to degrade women. It is republished in Bono and Kemp 1991.
- 23 Bono and Kemp 1991, 15, 17.
- 24 Jeffries 1994, xii–xiii.
- 25 Ginsborg 2003, 77.
- 26 Ibid., 79.
- 27 Laura Laurenzi, quoted in *ibid.*
- 28 Counihan 2004, 82.
- 29 Ibid., 83.
- 30 Christopher Carrington (1999) studies lesbian and gay male domestic relationships among a study population in Chicago who vary in age, social class background, and orientation. His findings were that many of the dynamics in gendered relationships, such as undervaluing of provisioning work, were present in gay families, though, of course, not aligned with gender.

LABOR

- 1 Ginsborg 2003, 35.
- 2 Ibid., 72.
- 3 In 1970, the average number of children per woman in Italy was 2.42, around the norm for the European community; by 1980 it was 1.64; by 1990 1.30, and by 1993 1.21 (*ibid.*, 69).
- 4 Balbo 1978.
- 5 Hochschild and Machung 1989.
- 6 DeVault 1991, 12, 13.
- 7 Counihan 2004, 154.
- 8 Ibid., 156.
- 9 Bimbi and Grazia 1990.
- 10 See Saraceno 1996. In chapter 5, “Famiglia, lavoro, economia” (177–215), Saraceno writes that domestic work is not only unbalanced but “a priori”: it is taken for granted in marriage, which undermines the partners’ parity and reciprocity, and also weakens

the woman's position in the labor market. See also Saraceno 2003, which analyzes the changes in the Italian family during the 1900s. She details changes in female participation in the labor force going back to the 1930s but notes that the economic recovery of the 1960s solidified male roles, increased wealth, and reinforced the "housewife as profession" pattern. In the 1970s women emerged in the labor market primarily in new sectors (tertiary), more consistent with the domestic world. Throughout this process domestic work remained on women's shoulders: the external work has come in addition to domestic work, which is taken for granted.

- 11 According to Counihan, "Between 1991 and 2001 small shops declined 24% from 254,000 to 193,000; between 1996 and 2000 number of supermarkets nearly doubled from 3,696 to 6,313." Many of her subjects had transitioned from shopping daily to shopping in supermarkets between the early 1980s, when her interviews were completed, and the years just before the publication of her book in the early 2000s (2004:127–28).
- 12 Atkins and Bowler 2001, 210. There is no citation for this statistic; it may refer to the time necessary to prepare frozen microwavable food for the table.
- 13 Ibid., 268.
- 14 Carrington 1999, 15.
- 15 Ibid., 64.
- 16 Ibid., 65.

CONSTRUCTING FOOD THE ITALIAN WAY

- 1 Kees De Roest and Alberto Menghi (2000, 439) note that Italian agriculture produces more than fifteen hundred different products, of which four hundred are cheeses.
- 2 Parks 1992, 225.
- 3 Capatti and Montanari 1999, 38.
- 4 Romer 1985, 30.
- 5 Ibid., 31.
- 6 Leitch 2000, 103.
- 7 An in interesting contemporary version is Laura Rangoni, described as an eccentric academic who lives on a valley near Bergamo and goes by the nickname Strega di Montagna (witch of the mountain). Laura Pazzagli describes "her passion . . . for untouched and uncontaminated nature and the discovery of ancient knowledge traditions passed through women. She has learned and taught others how to live off herbs, love them, respect them, heal with them and, in turn, help the herbs when she can" (http://www.virtualitalia.com/recipes/edible_weeds.shtml).
- 8 The courageous reports of Roberto Saviano (2008) tell this disturbing story.
- 9 Helstosky 2004, 33.
- 10 Though one must realize the potential mystification of the story, the restaurant where the first pizza Margherita emerged was the Pietro il Pizzaiolo, now called Pizzeria Brandi (Williams 2002, 96–97).
- 11 Cox 2000.
- 12 Olive oil history, n.d.
- 13 Caggiano 2001, 14.
- 14 Adapted from <http://www.oliveoilsource.com/tasting.htm>.
- 15 This point is well made in the National Museum of Pasta Foods, an informative Roman

museum on Piazza Scanderbeg, about a block from the Trevi Fountain. It is a must-visit site for all those interested in pasta or Italian food in general.

- 16 Serventi and Sabban 2002.
- 17 Johns 2001, 8.
- 18 See Serventi and Sabban 2002, 79, 80, 82, for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century woodcuts that depict precisely how these brakes worked.
- 19 See *ibid.*, 135, for a historical image of an early motorized press.
- 20 Sacchetti 1999, 3.
- 21 Serventi and Sabban 2002, 109.
- 22 Johns 2001, 9–10, 27.
- 23 Serventi and Sabban 2002, 204.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 215.
- 25 These are described by Pamela Johns (2001, 17–28) in her report on several hand-made artisan pasta factories in Italy. The slow and labor-intensive production increases the cost three to four times yet still yields very inexpensive food.
- 26 Romer 1985, 35–36.
- 27 Caggiano 2001, 16.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 29 Buford 2006, 3–4. Buford takes his readers through several aspects of Italian food culture, including apprenticeships in high-end Italian restaurants in New York and to butchers in Tuscany.
- 30 Leitch's research (2000 and 2003) provided much of our information on *lardo di Colonnata*. She did her PhD research in Colonnata and returned during the local lard's sudden rise to fame.
- 31 Buford 2006, 293.
- 32 Harper 2001.
- 33 De Roest and Menghi 2000.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 441.
- 35 Atkins and Bowler 2001, 215.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 The "Slow Food movement" began in Italy but is now international. It began in the 1990s as a cultural response to "fast food" and has led to chapters in more than one hundred countries and nearly 100,000 members worldwide. There are many publications sponsored by and describing the Slow Food movement; a collection edited by the founder, Carlo Petrini (2001), is a good place to begin. For a critique of the alleged elitism and "nostalgic renderings of the 'other'" which have been attributed to the movement, see Donati 2005. Her summary of the political nuances of the Slow Food movement is important, and her bibliography on the Slow Food debate is indispensable.

FOOD COMBINATIONS, MEAL SEQUENCE, AND BODILY WELL-BEING

- 1 Capatti and Montanari (1999, 121–228) have noted the impact of Galen on medieval Italian meals and food sensibilities. We are extending their argument into the present. We have been informed by several texts on Galen, but Mark Grant's 2000 book is the most useful for highlighting how Galen's gastronomy was part of his philosophical system.

- 2 Tucci's *Big Night* is one of the best for exploring the emotions, identities, and trauma of immigration.
- 3 Capatti and Montanari 1999, 121.
- 4 Boylan 2006.
- 5 Capatti and Montanari 1999, 121).
- 6 Ibid., 122.
- 7 Giacosa 1992, 2–16.
- 8 Capatti and Montanari 1999, 125.
- 9 Quoted in *ibid.*, 126.
- 10 Mary Douglas wrote the first and most important studies on the structure of the meal in the United Kingdom (1975, 1982, 1984). Her work drew upon observations of everyday life, including her own family's eating, and as a result she is well known for defending the small case study approach. We find useful her understanding of food and eating as codes that carries messages about social events and social relations, and her understanding that meals are structured in ways that tie people to each other and to the society they are a part of. We have borrowed her A-2b symbol system (main dish and two supporting elements) to describe Italian dinners, and we note her insight that the structure of a meal also implies a division of labor that produces it. Finally, we draw from Douglas an awareness of improvisation in the context of structure. Each meal, she writes, is a version of all the meals that preceded it, and these impose heavy expectations on what will follow. While the meals she described in the United Kingdom are thirty years out of date, I'm certain that among the old English the structure she described continues to exist. In any case, her ideas compelled us to see the meal as a critical center for our study. Ann Murcott (1982) drew from Douglas in her analysis of the rigid and structure of the menu in South Wales, and David Sutton (2001) uses the insights of Douglas to guide his study of food on a Greek island.
- 11 Capatti and Montanari 1999, 139.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Parks 1996, 157.
- 14 Ibid., 101.
- 15 The concepts of manifest and latent functions are generally attributed to Robert K. Merton. Writing in reference to Hopi rain ceremonies, Merton states that "with the concept of latent function, . . . [we] examin[e] . . . the consequences of the ceremony not for the rain gods or for meteorological phenomena, but for the groups which conduct the ceremony. And here it may be found, as many observers indicate, that the ceremonial does indeed have functions—but functions which are non-purposed or latent" (1957, 64). Merton's contribution led us to see social life with a surface reality that is often at odds with, or at least completely different from, the latent functions that loom in the background but may in fact be much more powerful. Common examples include certain kinds of educational experiences for teaching unstated lessons of conformity and obedience, the significance of the theater of the courtroom to create solemnity, and so forth. Hannah Bradby's analysis of the marriage meal among Glasgow Punjabis (2002) shows the continuing use of Mertonian concepts.

CLASS, REGIONALISM, AND COMMITMENT

- 1 Parks 1996, 135.
- 2 Capatti and Montanari 1999, which we relied on extensively, is among the few such studies that have been translated. In Italian, the main studies are A. Capatti, A. De Bernardi, and A. Varoni, *La storia d'Italia: L'alimentazione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1988), and J. L. Flandin and M. Montanari, *Storia dell'alimentazione* (Rome: Laterza, 1997). A historical view is also found in P. Sorcinelli, *Gli italiani e il cibo* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 1999); P. Camporesi, *Il paese della fame* (Milan: Garzanti, 1978); and P. Camporesi, *La terra e la luna: Alimentazione, folklore, società* (Milan: Garzanti, 1995).
- 3 Puzo 1984, 180.
- 4 Romer 1985, 80–89.
- 5 Home-cooked meals by the best cooks in Italy, n.d.

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"In *The Italian Way* Harper and Faccioli present an intriguing discussion of Bolognese foodways that reveals much about Italian culture. The authors focus on how food reflects Italian identity, on the contrast between Italy's history of scarcity and its present abundance, and on food's expression of sacred and profane value systems. Historical and contemporary photographs complement the interviews to make *The Italian Way* an original look at eating in Bologna."

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